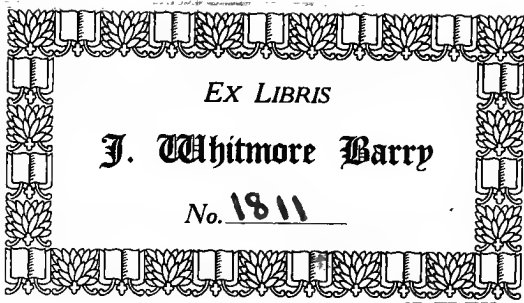




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AGLAUAINÉ AND SELYSETTE

IN PREPARATION

Plays, Pleasant and Unpleasant

BY

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Two Volumes, 3s. 6d. each

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AGLAVAINÉ AND
SELYSETTE

A DRAMA
IN FIVE ACTS

BY MAURICE
MAETERLINCK

TRANSLATED

BY ALFRED
SUTRO

WITH AN
INTRODUCTION

BY J. W.

MACKAIL

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INTRODUCTION

IN the remarkable volume of essays which M. Maeterlinck published last year, a sentence occurs which might be taken as the text of a discourse upon his whole dramatic work and method. *Les hommes*, he says, *ont je ne sais quelle peur étrange de la beauté*. The drama of which an English rendering is given in this volume is the latest of a series of plays in which, with continually increasing power and subtlety, he has attempted to disengage the inner beauty that lies deep at the heart of life itself. The romantic drama, with all its large possibilities of treatment, has shrunk, except now and then in the hands of its greatest masters, from the deepest expression of this spiritual beauty. Where we feel most, we are often most shy of saying all we mean ; and to express such

feelings in language that is at once adequate and sincere implies skill and courage of no ordinary degree. M. Maeterlinck is widely known as the inventor of a dramatic method which, with certain obvious imperfections, is vivid, flexible, far-reaching. It is still more important to recognise that this method is the vehicle of a new and strange sense of beauty.

This newness, this strangeness of beauty, is what is meant by the word *romance*; and it is by comparison with other movements of the romantic spirit that it may best be appreciated in its real meaning. Being of the nature of a new sense, and only incidentally of a new method of expression, it does not appear at once in definite forms. It may even wander about from art to art, seeking for means of outlet. The analogy which certainly exists between M. Maeterlinck's dramatic pieces and the painting of his distinguished countryman, M. Fernand Khnopff, may be traced back to a common impulse—that of expressing, by such means as the existing arts supply or suggest, the inner meaning and hidden beauty of things as they are freshly felt by a mind which approaches them quite courageously and quite simply.

The new romantic movement in Belgium has a close historical relation to the great romantic movement of France proper, the influence of which after sixty years still remains unexhausted. But it also—as the Belgian critics themselves point out—has been deeply influenced by England. The direct study of the Elizabethan drama has had an obvious effect on these plays in choice of method and inspiration of subject. And another English influence is not less certain or less powerful—that of the romantic movement which originated, some forty years ago, among an obscure group of Oxford undergraduates, and which has since effected so great a change, not only in specific arts like poetry and painting, but in the serious daily thought of mankind with regard to beauty.

La Princesse Maleine, the earliest and by far the crudest and most fantastic of the plays, is also the one which shows the Elizabethan influence in its most direct action and at its highest force. The new thrill which all romantic movements seek is attained in it by the element of undefined supernatural suggestion, which gives *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* their unique horror, and which is used with an inferior, but scarcely more imitable magic by Shakespeare's great successors.

invented, one might almost say, certainly moulded to a very distinct and individual form and use, a dramatic method, subtle, vivid, fantastic, going curiously near to the inner life and heart of things. They touched the springs of pity and terror with extraordinary power. They showed delicate insight, romantic feeling, dramatic force of a high order. They showed a power over language which was akin to a real creative gift. Their faults were no less obvious. They were those indicated once for all, in words unapproachable for their delicate accuracy, by Keats in his famous preface to *Endymion*: "great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt rather than a deed accomplished." "The imagination of a boy is healthy"—one can hardly forbear going on with the immortal words—"and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain." The faculty of design, the certain control of beauty, were still to come. But come they did. M. Maeterlinck did not reply—probably did not listen—to the murmurings of dislike, of ridicule, of half-uneasy contempt with which a large number of his critics met

him ; his answer was the production, early in 1892, of another romantic drama, *Pélléas et Mélisande*.

Of this play, all but faultless in its construction, more than faultless in its beauty, it is difficult to speak with tempered praise, or in words that shall not seem extravagant. In virtue of mere beauty it stands among the masterpieces of literature. All the qualities of the earlier plays are disengaged from their defects. The morbid tone has disappeared ; the fantastic element is under control. The symbolism is set back to its proper plane. In the crude form in which it is an uncomfortable quality at best, it only remains in the brief and curiously exciting prologue. The story is one of quite human beauty and sorrow. Pélléas, Golaud, the young wife, the aged king, are no phantasmal types, no reminiscences of some mediæval portrait gallery. The finding of Mélisande, by the well in the wood, out of which, like an Undine, she might almost be fancied to have arisen, is the only concession made to the purely fantastic side of romance. But it is needless to insist upon the skill with which it is worked into the structure of the play, or the extraordinary force which it adds to the final scene, with its wild spiritual beauty—*elle est née*

sans raison, pour mourir, et elle meurt sans raison—

“she came like water, and like wind she goes.”

The advance in matured power is equally visible in the management of the language. *Il n'y a guère* (to quote again from M. Maeterlinck the critic) *que les paroles qui semblent d'abord inutiles qui comptent dans une œuvre.* In this somewhat paradoxical expression one may recognise the restatement of an old truth; that in imaginative literature of a high order the suggestion of the words is always more, and may be quite infinitely more, than their expression. It is this indefinable and incalculable power of suggestion which gives poetry its romantic or magical note. Language at a high tension may obtain a value and a power of which it is impossible to give any reasoned account, and which lies partly in the mere poise and cadence of syllables, partly in the fact that the thought or emotion which passes alive into the words does not die there, but keeps in them some of its own vital energy. In this play the language is severely and almost nakedly simple. Even the rare metaphors are introduced in the most curiously tentative way, as of a person handling money in a strange currency. *On dirait par moments, qui il y a cent ans*

que je ne l'ai plus vue—the timid, laboured expression, with its dragging syllables, is that of one to whom words are still something magical. Its troubled beauty lies poles apart from the facile rhetoric of the traditional drama.

The use of language to produce the emotional effect of music, which has been noticed as a distinctive quality of M. Maeterlinck's work, is carried here to a much higher degree of perfection. The echoes and repetitions of phrase are used with increased skill, more accurately judged and wrought in a freer and larger pattern. It is well known that the structure of Athenian literature, the demand which it made on the perceptions of its readers, was both in prose and verse immensely more complex than that of ours. In this play the elaboration of the language, notwithstanding its limpid clearness, is commensurate with that of a Greek chorus. As in an ode of Pindar, assonances and keywords lie pages apart and only give themselves up to minute observation. In one, and that perhaps the most beautiful instance, the echo reaches over more than half the play; nor is there anything in Shakespeare himself more poignant than those words heard by the noonday fountain, and

faintly repeated in the last scene by the girl's dying lips.

Nor is the dramatic skill less striking than the finished beauty of the language: and among those who saw it performed in London in the summer of 1894 by M. Lugué-Poe and his company there seems to be only one opinion as to its unusual scenic effectiveness. It would seem to be the only one of M. Maeterlinck's plays in which he has chosen to comply rigorously with the conditions of the modern stage. The three dramatic pieces which appeared in a later volume are significantly described on the title page as *Petits Drames pour Marionnettes*, and revert, though with an increased power and sureness of touch, to the mystical or symbolic treatment of his earlier works.

It is in this later group of plays that the second great English influence which affected M. Maeterlinck's work appears in its full force: that of the Arthurian legend as interpreted anew by the individual genius of two great English artists and thinkers. The number of names transferred or adapted in these plays from the story of the Round Table is only one indication of this influence: Pélleas, Ygraine, Palomides,

Tintagiles all come saturated with the associations of the *Mort d'Arthur*. The Pre-Raphaelite movements in poetry and in painting are alike expressions of a certain Pre-Raphaelitism of thought which on its more imaginative side turns to that story, the fine flower of mediæval romance, as to its natural home. The combination in these plays of an unusual directness of thought and straightforwardness of expression with a troubled brooding, a pervading sense of some unexpressed romantic or spiritual beauty, may remind one sometimes of the early poetry and prose of Mr. Morris himself. In *The Hollow Land* there is a wonderful passage in which the artifice of repetition is used exactly as M. Maeterlinck uses it, with an effect of magical magnificence, and it is certainly significant that the author of *Rapunzel* and *The Defence of Guenevere*, who seldom could be induced to take much interest in a new author, and seldomer still in a new dramatist, gave to *Pelléas et Mélisande* the tribute of a praise as high as it was rare.

But even here the contrast is as striking as the analogy. In the work of the English poet, the outward world is dwelt upon with the utmost keenness of observation and an almost physical delight in

description. He had the eye that at a single glance takes in everything "from the snail on the wall to the setting sun," and the acute joy of the bodily senses that can never have enough of definite form and colour; that lingers delightedly over the specks of white in a painted book, the surface of wet slates under torchlight, the folds of drapery, the curves of armour. In combined sensitiveness to impression and power of observation he is almost unequalled: and there is perhaps no other poet of the first rank who leaves so little to mere suggestion, in whom the actual expression of the meaning he would convey is so frank, explicit, and complete. M. Maeterlinck is acutely sensitive, but one does not gather from the plays that he is specially observant. With him, suggestion is nearly everything. The physical surroundings of life are reduced to a series of formal, repeatable, and sometimes almost abstract symbols; and it is on the inner world, the still depths of the human soul, that he concentrates his interest. The "sad sick sunflowers" of *A Good Knight in Prison* are the projection, upon the vividly seen and felt outer world, of a certain mood of mind: how like in tone, how totally different in means of expression, is

the wonderful *Je crois que mes mains sont malades aujourd'hui* of the Princess Mélisande !

Almost from the first, M. Maeterlinck seems to have arrived at definite notions as to the stock of scenery which would be sufficient for his stage; and he brings pieces of it out again, when they are needed, with the utmost nonchalance. An admirer of his has been heard to say that "he was sick of that tower" when it reappeared once more in *Aglavaine et Sélysette*. In *La Princesse Maleine*, the scene was definitely placed in the Netherlands, the greater part of it at the castle of Ysselmonde, among the languid tides and fever-stricken estuaries of the Meuse. In the other plays no place or country is definitely indicated. There are features in the scenery which convey suggestions of Ghent and the author's home near the great canal of Terneuse; of the threading waterways of that forlorn-looking city, its three hundred bridges, its huge prison, the two great asylums for the blind and dumb, the little dreamy world of the Béguinage. In such surroundings *Les Aveugles* and *La Mort de Tintagiles* might not unnaturally frame themselves. But through all the plays something of the same atmosphere may be felt

as a faintly indicated background : old thinly inhabited castles, terraced and moated ; trailing canals ; trees in long files and avenues ; a tower in the middle of a wood, haunted by sea-fowl from the bordering ocean ; curtain-like draperies of cloud off a low coast ; silent pools suddenly startled by the beating of swans' wings in the dusk. Beyond all, we feel the perpetual presence of water ; tinkling from a fountain in the middle of a wood, sounding dully in vaults underground, washing against terraced cliffs and sea-caverns, shining in flat spaces of dull silver, running before the wind in little green waves, ubiquitous, infiltrating, all-surrounding, as though the solid earth itself might melt into it. Nor is he ever tired of strange, variable effects of light : the gleam over sheets of water, skies thick-sown with stars, fire in the dusk, lamplight from indoors striking suddenly out of a window on green boughs of trees.

For the play which is here presented in an English dress no special words of preface are required. It may be left to make its own impression. Some of its indefinable charm of language must no doubt be lost in a translation ; and the rounded completeness of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the finished repose in which it ends, are

scarcely rivalled here. *Aglavaine et Sélysette* ends on a cry, haunting indeed, but not satisfying. In the *Trésor des Humbles* M. Maeterlinck appeared as a professed Neo-Platonist, a thinker and mystic, saturated in Emerson, and finding inspiration from Plotinus and Swedenborg. This growing philosophic passion may involve a certain expense of dramatic quality. But there is here an even higher attainment in delicate insight, and in the power of expressing by simple words some of the subtlest and most elusive shades of emotion.

It has little interplay of action. The invention of the third actor, as Aristotle notes, was the capital point in the development of the drama. Here there are in effect only two. Beyond Aglavaine and Sélysette themselves there are really no characters. It is this which places it in dramatic quality on a different plane from *Pelléas et Mélisande*, with its subtle and masterly interaction of three forces. Here Méléandre only stands still while the two great forces are at their work. He and Mélégrane are not so much persons as necessary dramatic symbols—one might say, a part of the scenery in its largest sense; and Yssaline (unlike the child Yniold in *Pelléas et*

Mélisande, who takes a definite part in the evolution of the tragedy) is merely a way of obtaining more vivid and heightened expression for one side of Sélysette. But praise cannot be too high for the fineness and truth of the two principal figures; nor for the consummate skill with which the interest, the sympathy, the beauty are slowly slid from one to the other, as Sélysette unfolds larger and larger, until she blots out her brilliant rival. Nor, given the story with its two actors, is there any inferiority in its dramatic handling. One point beyond all deserves special notice. The artifice of repetition, already applied with such subtle skill to language, is here extended with wonderful effect to action. The doubling of the scene on the tower in the fourth act, led up to by the doubled meeting in the corridor, brings the action itself towards the condition of music. A situation which, abstractly stated, is commonplace to the verge of sordidness, has been subtilised into profound meaning and triumphant beauty.

This inner beauty of human life, of which M. Maeterlinck is so curious and subtle an interpreter, is also its inner truth. *Haec omnia in figura contin-*

gebant illis: scripta sunt autem ad correptionem nostram, in quos fines seculorum devenerunt. We live in a period rich almost beyond parallel in accumulated treasures of beauty, produced by the great artists and thinkers of Western Europe during the last hundred years. But it is only from living art of its own that any age can draw real life. It relieves the darkness of our outlook to see, amid the triumph of an ugliness that grows day by day more insolent, more elaborate, more all-pervasive, the unconquerable resurgence of beauty—*la domination d'une âme qui se laisse être belle.*

J. W. MACKAIL.

AGLAUAINÉ AND SELYSETTE

Translated by Alfred Sutro

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MELEANDER.

AGLAVAINÉ.

SELYSETTE.

MELIGRANE (SELYSETTE'S *grandmother*).

LITTLE YSSALINE (SELYSETTE'S *sister*).

AGLAVAINÉ AND SELYSETTE

ACT FIRST

A Room in the Castle.

MELIGRANE *is asleep on a high-backed chair at the far end of the room. Enter MELEANDER and SELYSETTE.*

MELEANDER.

I will read you Aglavaine's letter: "Do not go out to meet me. Wait for me in the room wherein you linger, every evening, till it be time for slumber—and thus shall I not come upon you as a stranger. It is as I leave the boat that has brought me to you that I write these lines. Our crossing was very calm and beautiful, but, when I landed, I found the roads all sodden with the rain; and the sun will probably have set ere I behold the towers of the old castle wherein

our good Selysette has offered shelter to her brother's widow. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Clapping her hands.*] Oh! the sun is setting! . . . Look!—she must be near at hand. . . . I will see whether

MELEANDER.

[*Staying her with a gesture, and continuing to read.*]
“ . . . I have only seen you once, Meleander, and it was in the midst of the confusion and distraction of my wedding—my poor wedding, alas! where we beheld not the guest none ever invite, but who always usurps the seat of the happiness we look for. Only once have I seen you, and more than three years have passed by since then; but I come to you as confidently as though we two had known each other from infancy, and had been rocked to sleep in the same cradle. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Turning round.*] Oh! Grandam is still asleep! . . . Ought we to wake her when Aglavaine comes? . . .

MELEANDER.

Yes, it is her wish. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Her eyes are almost hidden beneath her white hair.
. . . She is not happy to-night. . . . Oh! I want to
kiss her. . .

MELEANDER.

Be careful you do not wake her too soon. . . . [*He
continues to read.*] “And, coming to you, I know
full well that it is a brother who will greet me! . . .
We said but little to each other, yet were the few
words you spoke shaped differently from all those I
had heard till then. . .

SELYSETTE.

Do not read so quickly. . .

MELEANDER.

[*Reading.*] “. . . And besides, I look forward so
eagerly to taking Selysette in my arms! . . . She must
be so good, she must be so beautiful, since she loves
you and is beloved of you. I feel that I shall love her
much more than you ever can, for I know how to give
more love; I have been unhappy. . . . And now, I am
glad to have suffered; I shall be able to share with
you all that sorrow brings us. There are times when
I think that the tribute I have paid may well suffice

for the three of us ; that destiny can have no further claim upon us and that we may look forward to a marvellous life. We shall seek happiness, and naught beside. And for you and for me, for Selysette too, to judge from the little you have told me of her, it is only in the purest sanctuary of our soul that happiness is to be found. No other care shall be ours than to become as beautiful as can be, so that we may ever love each other the more ; and we shall become good from the mere force of loving. We shall so fill ourselves, and all that is about us, with beauty, that there will no longer be room for sorrow or misfortune ; and, would these none the less force their entrance, needs must they too become beautiful before they dare knock against our door."

[A door opens. Enter little YSSALINE.]

YSSALINE.

I have the key, little sister, I have the key! . . .

MELEANDER.

What key?

SELYSETTE.

The key of the old lighthouse.

MELEANDER.

I thought it had been lost. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I have had another one made.

MELEANDER.

I shall be glad if you lose that one too. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Examining the key.*] Oh! how large it is! . . . It does not look like the one I lost.

YSSALINE.

I was there, little sister, when they tried it. . . . They opened the door three times, then they shut it again. . . . It fits much better than the other key, which was all rusty. . . . But they found it difficult to close the door the last time, because of the wind, which was pushing from the other side. . . . There is a great wind to-night. You can hear the sea-gulls all round the tower; and the doves too. . . . They have not yet gone to sleep. . . .

SELYSETTE.

They are looking for me; they have not seen me up there for a long time—two weeks and more. . . . I will go to-morrow.

YSSALINE.

With me, little sister?

SELYSETTE.

Yes, if you will go to bed at once; your nurse is waiting. . . . [*YSSALINE goes.*] She is beautiful? . . .

MELEANDER.

Who?

SELYSETTE.

Aglavaine.

MELEANDER.

Yes, very beautiful. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Whom is she like?

MELEANDER.

She is like no other woman. . . . Her beauty is different, that is all . . . stranger and more ethereal; it is never the same—one might almost say it was more manifold . . . it is a beauty along which the soul can pass unhindered . . . and her hair is very strange. . . . You will see. . . . It seems to take part in every one of her thoughts. . . . As she is happy or sad so does her hair smile or weep, and this even at times when she herself scarcely knows whether she should be happy or whether she should be sad. . . . I

have never seen hair so full of life. . . . It would be constantly betraying her, if betrayal it could be to reveal a beauty one fain would hide; for that is all she ever has to hide. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I know I am not beautiful. . . .

MELEANDER.

You will never say that again, once she is here. It is impossible to say anything that one does not believe, or that is useless, in her presence. Nothing can live near her that is not true. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing can live near her that is not true. . . .

MELEANDER.

Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Meleander?

MELEANDER.

We have been living together for nearly four years, have we not? . . .

SELYSETTE.

It will be four years, when the summer ends.

MELEANDER.

Nearly four years that you have been by my side, always beautiful, always tender and loving, and the soft smile on your lips revealed the deep happiness within. . . . Tell me, you have not shed many tears during these four years? At most some few little tears at times when a pet bird flew away, or your grandmother reproved you, or your favourite flowers died. But no sooner had the bird returned, or your grandmother been appeased—no sooner were the flowers forgotten than you came back into the room laughing merrily; and the doors would shake and windows fly open and all sorts of things be knocked over as you leaped upon my knee, kissing me like a little girl home from school. I think we may fairly claim to have been happy; and yet there are times when I wonder whether we have truly lived near enough to each other. . . . I know not whether it was I who lacked the patience to follow you, or you who fled too swiftly; but often, when I would try to speak to you as I spoke just now, you would seem to reply to me from the other end of the world, where reasons that are unknown to me had impelled you to seek refuge. . . . Can it indeed be that our soul stands in such dread of a little earnestness, of a little more truth, in love? Have we not many times forced ourselves to keep

aloof from something that might have been beautiful, that might have drawn us closer together than a kiss on the lips? . . . I do not know why this is borne home to me so clearly this evening.—Is it because Aglavaine lives more freshly in my memory? Has her letter, the news of her arrival, already freed something in our soul?—You and I would seem to have loved each other as much as it is possible to love. But, when she is there, we shall love each other still more; we shall love each other differently, our love will go deeper down—you will see. . . . And this it is above all that makes me so glad of her coming. . . . Alone, I could not. . . . I have not the power she possesses, though I see as she sees. She is one of those to whom it is given to unite the soul with its fountain-head: and when she is there one feels that there is no longer anything between oneself and that which is truth. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Love her if you will. I shall go away. . . .

MELEANDER.

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

I know that I cannot understand. . . .

MELEANDER.

You do understand, Selysette, and it is because I know that you understand, though you feign the contrary, that I speak to you of these things. . . There are depths in your soul that you never reveal to me; nay, you take pleasure in hiding them, when I go forth in search of you. . . Do not cry, Selysette, I am far from reproaching you. . .

SELYSETTE.

I am not crying. Wherefore should I cry?

MELEANDER.

And yet I can see that your lips are trembling. . .

SELYSETTE.

My thoughts were far away. . . Is it true that she has been very unhappy?

MELEANDER.

Yes, she has been very unhappy on account of your brother. . .

SELYSETTE.

Perhaps she deserved to be. . .

MELEANDER.

I doubt whether a woman can ever have deserved to be very unhappy. . .

SELYSETTE.

What did my brother do to her ?

MELEANDER.

She begged me not to tell you. . .

SELYSETTE.

You have been writing to each other ?

MELEANDER.

Yes ; from time to time.

SELYSETTE.

You never told me.

MELEANDER.

When letters came from her I have more than once shown them to you, but you did not seem anxious to read them. . .

SELYSETTE.

I don't remember. . .

MELEANDER.

But I remember it well. . .

SELYSETTE.

Where was it that you saw her for the last time ?

MELEANDER.

I told you that I had only seen her once ; it was in the grounds of your brother's castle. . . . With great trees spreading over us. . .

SELYSETTE.

In the evening ?

MELEANDER.

Yes ; in the evening.

SELYSETTE.

What did she say ?

MELEANDER.

We said but little to each other. But we could see that the lives of both of us tended towards the same goal. . .

SELYSETTE.

Did you kiss each other ?

MELEANDER.

When ?

SELYSETTE.

On that evening. . .

MELEANDER.

Yes, when I went away. . .

SELYSETTE.

Ah!

MELEANDER.

I think she will stay but a short time with us, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no; I want her to stay. . . . [*There is a noise outside.*] There she is! [*She runs to the window.*] There are torches in the courtyard.

[A moment's silence. The great door opens and AGLAVINE appears on the threshold. She comes in without saying a word, and stands in front of SELYSETTE, looking fixedly at her.]

MELEANDER.

Will you not kiss each other?

AGLAVINE.

Yes. [*She presses a long kiss on SELYSETTE's lips, then goes to MELEANDER, whom she kisses likewise.*] And you too. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I must awaken grandam. . . .

AGLAVINE.

[*Looking at MELIGRANE.*] How profoundly she sleeps! . . .

MELEANDER.

She lies asleep like this for many hours each day. . . . Her arms are paralysed. . . . Go close to her; she wishes to see you to-night. . . .

AGLAVINE.

[*Taking MELIGRANE'S hand and bending over her.*] Grandmother! . . .

MELIGRANE.

[*Awaking.*] Selysette! . . . [*She opens her eyes.*] Oh! who are you?

AGLAVINE.

Aglavaine. . . .

MELIGRANE.

I was frightened. . . .

AGLAVINE.

May I kiss you, grandmother?

MELIGRANE.

You call me grandmother? I cannot see you very well. . . . Who is that behind you?

SELYSETTE.

[*Coming forward.*] It is I, grandam.

MELIGRANE.

Ah ! it is you, Selysette. . . . I could not see you. . . .
Bring the lamp a little nearer, my child. . . .

[SELYSETTE *brings a lamp, whose light falls on*
AGLAVINE.

MELIGRANE.

[*Looking at AGLAVINE.*] Oh ! you are beautiful ! . . .

AGLAVINE.

May I kiss you now, grandmother ?

MELIGRANE.

No ; do not kiss me to-night. . . . The pain is worse
than usual. Selysette is the only one who can touch
me without hurting me.

AGLAVINE.

That is what I want to learn, too—to touch with-
out hurting. . . .

MELIGRANE.

[*Eyeing her fixedly.*] I wonder whether it can be
right to be so beautiful. . . .

AGLAVINE.

Surely it is ordained that we should be as beautiful
as it is possible to be, grandmother. . . .

MELIGRANE.

Kiss me, Selysette, before I go to sleep again, and take away the lamp. . . . I was in the midst of a strange dream. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Going back with the lamp.*] You must forgive her; she suffers so much. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

What is there to forgive, Selysette? You have dropped something. . . . What is it that has fallen on the floor? [*She picks up a key.*] Oh! what a strange key! . . .

SELYSETTE.

It is the key of my tower. . . . You don't know all that it throws open. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

It is strange and heavy. . . . I, too, have brought a golden key; you shall see. . . . So long as we know not what it opens, nothing can be more beautiful than a key. . . .

SELYSETTE.

You shall know to-morrow. . . . Did you notice, when you came here, a very old tower, with its turret all in ruins, at the far end of the castle?

AGLAVINE.

Yes; I saw something that seemed to be crumbling beneath the sky. The stars shone through the crevices in the wall.

SELYSETTE.

Well, that is it; it is my tower—an old forsaken lighthouse. No one dared to go up there. . . . You have to traverse a long corridor, of which I found the key. But then I lost it again. . . . Now I have had another one made, for I am the only one who goes there. Sometimes Yssaline accompanies me. Meleander only went once; he felt giddy. It is very high—you will see. The ocean stretches before you. It foams all round the tower, except on the castle side. And all the birds of the sea live in the crevices of the walls. They send forth loud cries when they recognise me. There are hundreds of doves, too; people tried to drive them away, but they refuse to leave the tower. They always come back. . . . Are you tired?

AGLAVINE.

Yes, a little, Selysette. I have had a long journey.

SELYSETTE.

Yes, of course. . . . We will go thither to-morrow; and besides, there is a strong wind to-night. . . .

[*A silence.*

B

MELEANDER.

It is strange, Aglavaine. . . . I had so much to tell you. . . . But in these first moments everything is still, and I feel as though there were something we were waiting for. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

We are waiting for the silence to speak. . . .

MELEANDER.

What does it say to you?

AGLAVAINÉ.

It would not be the real silence, Meleander, were we able to repeat all that it tells us. . . . We have exchanged a few, almost meaningless, words—words that any one could have spoken—and for all that, do we not feel at rest, do we not know that we have said things to each other that far outvalue our words? We have uttered the little timid words that strangers speak when they meet; and yet, who can tell all that has taken place between the three of us? Who can tell whether all that has to happen may not have been decided beneath one of these words? . . . Is there any destiny that words have never influenced? But this much our silence has foretold to me;

it is that I shall love Selysette like a little sister. . . . It cried that out to me, through all my soul, as I took my first step into the room ; and it is the only voice that has been clear to me. . . . [*Drawing SELYSETTE to her.*] Why is it, Selysette, that one has to love you so dearly, and that the unbidden tears flow forth as one kisses you ? . . . [*She presses a long kiss on her lips.*] Come, you too, Meleander. . . . [*She kisses him likewise.*] It was perhaps this kiss for which we were all waiting, and it will be the seal of our silence for the night. . . .

[*They go out.*]

ACT SECOND

SCENE I.—*A leafy grove in the park.*

Enter AGLAVINE and MELEANDER.

MELEANDER.

For five or six days only have we been living together under this roof, and already can I scarcely realise that we were not born in the same cradle. It seems to me that we can never have been separated; that I must have known you before I knew myself. All that I am appears to result from you; I am more conscious of your soul than of my own, you are nearer to me than all that is myself; and were it said to me "you must save your life" it is your life that I should have to save, so that I might live. . . . Were you not there I should no longer be conscious of myself; it is only in you that I can smile, only in you that I can love. Often does it seem to me as though my soul, my being, and all that in them lies, had changed their dwelling-place, and when my arms

are about you, they appear but to enfold that part of myself which is not of this world, and I cannot keep back my tears. . .

AGLAVINE.

So it is with me, too, Meleander. When I embrace you I seem to be embracing myself as I shall be when greater beauty has come to me. . . It is only when you are by me that I am beautiful; it is only by the side of your soul that I can listen to my own. I go in search of myself and it is in you that I am to be found: I seek you and discover you within myself. . . Neither our hands, nor our souls, nor our lips, seem to exist apart. . . I can no longer tell whether you are the radiance of me or whether I am becoming your light. . . So strangely does all blend within us that it is impossible to discover where the one begins and the other leaves off. . . Your least gesture reveals me to myself; there is not a smile, not a silence, not a word that comes from you but links me to a newer beauty. . . I feel that I flower in you as you flower in me; and we are ever springing to birth again in each other. . .

MELEANDER.

There is but one thing that still divides us; it is our constant wonder. . .

AGLAVINE.

Yes; I marvel day and night that a being such as you should actually exist. . .

MELEANDER.

I too, Aglavaine. . . My eyes, my hands, my ears no longer suffice for me. . . As I look at you, as I listen to you, I tell myself that I am dreaming; when you are no longer there, I am sure it has been nothing but a dream; when I no longer hear your voice I feel that my senses have been deceiving me. . . Then you appear again, and still I can scarcely believe. . . I see you, I hear you, my arms enfold you, and even at that moment I fain would fly, so as to seek certainty, away from you. . .

AGLAVINE.

I too, Meleander. . . When I am by your side, I yet desire to leave you, so that I may be alone and thus behold you the nearer; and when I am alone I wander forth in search of you, for I know that your soul is waiting for me, and holds me infinitely more beautiful than I can imagine. . . I know not what it is we should do, in the midst of happiness such as ours; and times there are when the mere force of gladness brings sorrow to me. . .

MELEANDER.

Where were you all these years of our life, when it never dawned upon us that the two of us were living? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I was thinking of that, too, Meleander; our souls speak to each other long before the words leave our lips. . .

MELEANDER.

And yet it is only after you have spoken to me that I hear the voice of my soul. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

So it is with me too, Meleander. As I listen to you, it is my soul that I hear; when I am silent, it is your soul that speaks to me. . . I can no longer find my soul without yours be there, too. And do I go in search of your soul, it is there that I find my own. . .

MELEANDER.

The same world is within us, Aglavainé. . . Doubtless must God have erred when he fashioned two souls out of our one. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

And you, Meleander, where were you, all these years that I have been waiting, in solitude? . . .

MELEANDER.

I was alone, too, and waiting, but hope had left me. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I was alone, and waiting, but had never ceased to hope. . .

MELEANDER.

But who told you that some one was waiting for you as I have been? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

No one told me; and nothing was known to me—unless it be perhaps the things one knows without knowing; and I knew you well though I never had seen you. . .

MELEANDER.

But could you love me as deeply as I loved you, before you had met me? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

And you, my Meleander, had you seen me, before we met, even as I had seen you? . . .

MELEANDER.

I cannot conceive that this thing that has happened to us can ever have happened to any one; I cannot conceive that there can be other lives like our life. . .

AGLAVINE.

Oh, there are times when I feel that it cannot be! . . .

MELEANDER.

I too, Aglavaine, and it frightens me. . .

AGLAVINE.

Why should you be frightened? . . . We have found each other, what can there be to fear?

MELEANDER.

Is it not at the very moment of happiness that fear should come to us? . . . Is that not the most ominous time of all? for not a kiss is given but an enemy may be awakened . . . and besides there is something else. . . .

AGLAVINE.

What?

MELEANDER.

Selysette. . . .

AGLAVINE.

Well?

MELEANDER.

Have you thought of Selysette?

AGLAVINE.

Yes.

MELEANDER.

And does that not trouble you?

AGLAVINE.

No, Meleander, it shall trouble me no more. . .

MELEANDER.

There may be sorrow in store for her. . .

AGLAVINE.

Can I not love you like a brother, Meleander?

MELEANDER.

But if her tears fall? . . .

AGLAVINE.

Let her ascend with us, and her tears will soon cease to flow. . . . Why should she not strive hand-in-hand with us towards the love that disdains the pettiness of love? She is more beautiful than you believe, Meleander. We will hold out our hands to her; she will soon rejoin us, and then she will weep no more. . . . And she will bless us for the tears she has shed, for some tears are sweeter than kisses. . .

MELEANDER.

Do you believe I can love you like a sister, Aglavaine?

AGLAVINE.

Ah! . . .

MELEANDER.

Do you believe you can love me like a brother, Aglavaine?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Now that you have asked me, I no longer seem to know, Meleander. . . .

MELEANDER.

I can believe it no longer. We shall struggle day and night; we shall struggle for a long, long time; and all that is most beautiful in us, all that might have turned into exquisite love, into beauty and deepest truth, will be exhausted in this futile effort. . . . And the more we struggle, the more shall we be conscious of a desire creeping up between our two souls like a heavy curtain. . . . And all that is best within us will perish, because of this desire. . . . It would seem to be but a very small thing that underlies all this, and yet may this small thing be strong enough to dis sever two souls for all time from their most perfect beauty. . . . Is it not by the kiss we give that all things are transformed—stars and flowers, night and morning, thoughts and tears? . . . Is the immensity of the night as clear to the sister's eyes as it is to those of the woman who loves? Let us not bar the door to the most beautiful of all truths, Aglavaine. . . .

Let not all the radiance of our two souls go break itself against one petty falsehood. . . You are not my sister, Aglavaine, and I cannot love you like a sister. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

It is true that you are not my brother, Meleander ; and it is here, doubtless, that suffering lies in wait for us. . .

MELEANDER.

Do you, too, then, love the suffering that serves no purpose ?

AGLAVAINÉ.

No, Meleander, but I do love the suffering that I can take away from others. . .

MELEANDER.

But what suffering is there here that we can take from others without killing all that is best in ourselves ?

AGLAVAINÉ.

That is not yet known to us, Meleander, still must we act as though we did know—and if error there has to be, better that it should be at the expense of ourselves. . .

MELEANDER.

I know it, Aglavaine, but what can we do ? . . .

AGLAVINE.

It was destiny that brought us together, Meleander. We recognised each other as perhaps two souls have never recognised each other before. We love; and henceforth there is nothing in the world that can bring about that I shall cease to love you, or that you shall no longer love me. . .

MELEANDER.

That I believe, too, Aglavaine.—I see nothing in the world. . .

AGLAVINE.

But were I to make an innocent creature weep, would I be the same to you? . . .

MELEANDER.

If her tears flow, it will only be because she has not understood. . .

AGLAVINE.

Not the less dolorous are the tears shed in error. . .

MELEANDER.

There would be nothing left for us but to fly from each other, Aglavaine; yet that is impossible! . . . A thing of so much beauty was not born only to die; and needs must we have duties towards ourselves. . .

AGLAVINE.

I believe that, too, Meleander; and I believe that there is something better to be done than to fly from one another. . . I cannot conceive that these things should have come to birth only to end in tears. . .

MELEANDER.

Why they come to birth we know not, Aglavaine; but we do know that never have we long to wait for tears. . .

AGLAVINE.

In the meanwhile, if suffering there must be, let that suffering be ours. . . There are countless forms of duty, Meleander; but I feel that we can rarely be wrong in trying first of all to relieve the feeble of their suffering, so that we may bear it ourselves. . .

MELEANDER.

[*Taking her in his arms.*] You are beautiful, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVINE.

[*Throwing her arms around him.*] I love you, Meleander. . .

MELEANDER.

Is it you who are crying, Aglavaine? . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

No; it is we, Meleander. . .

MELEANDER.

And is it we who are trembling? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Yes. . .

[They kiss each other. A cry of pain is heard, through the foliage, and SELYSETTE is seen, all dishevelled, flying towards the castle.]

MELEANDER.

Selysette! . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Yes. . .

MELEANDER.

She has overheard us. . . She is flying to the castle. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[Pointing to SELYSETTE, who is already far away.]
Go after her! . . . Go! . . .

[He rushes after SELYSETTE. AGLAVAINÉ leans against a tree and weeps silently.]

SCENE II.—*In the depths of the park. AGLAVAINÉ is asleep on a bench, with a veil thrown round her head.*

Enter SELYSETTE.

SELYSETTE.

“Selysette, little Selysette, we must not let her cry.”
. . . He pities me, because he no longer loves me. . .
Neither do I love him any more. . . They fancy that
I shall keep very quiet, and that all they have to do
is to kiss me with their eyes turned away. . .
“Selysette, little Selysette.” . . They say that very
tenderly; oh, much more tenderly than they used to.
. . . When he kisses me now he dares not look at
me; or if he does, he seems to be begging for forgive-
ness. . . And while they are embracing each other
I must crouch away and hide, as though I had stolen
something. . . They have gone out again to-night,
and I have lost sight of them. . . “Little Selysette” is
not in the secret . . . we always smile when we
speak to her . . . we kiss her on the forehead . . . and
bring her flowers and fruit. . . The stranger takes
“little Selysette” under her wing . . . and we cry
when we kiss her, and say, “Poor little thing . . .
there is nothing to be done. . . . She will not go
away . . . but at least she shall not see anything” . . .

. . . and when her head is turned we take each other by the hand . . . yes, yes, till the time comes . . . only wait, wait. . . . "Little Selysette" will have her day too. . . . She does not yet quite know what she ought to do, but wait a little . . . we shall see. . . [*Perceiving AGLAVINE on the bench.*] There they are! . . . Asleep in each other's arms! . . . Oh! this! this! . . . I must . . . Yssaline! Grandam! . . . They must see . . . they must see this! . . . There is no one coming! . . . I am alone, always. . . . I will . . . [*Going closer.*] She is alone, too . . . was it a ray of the moon or her white veil? Perhaps . . . She is asleep. What shall I do? . . . Oh, she doesn't know! . . . She is on the brink of the reservoir; a sudden turn and she would fall into the tank . . . it has been raining . . . she threw her veil over her head, but her bosom is bare . . . she is wet through . . . how cold she must be . . . this country is strange to her . . . Did she fall down or can she be ill? . . . Oh, how she trembles in her sleep! . . . I will put my cloak around her . . . [*She covers AGLAVINE up and lifts the veil that hides her face.*] How deep is this sleep of hers! . . . She looks as though she had been crying . . . she does not seem happy . . . she seems no happier than I . . . How pale she is; she is crying too, I see. . . . She is

beautiful. . . . She is even more beautiful when she is so pale . . . she seems to blend with the light of the moon . . . I must wake her gently . . . she might be frightened and fall into the well . . . [*Bending tenderly over her.*] Aglavaine . . . Aglavaine . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Waking.*] Ah! . . . how light it is. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Be careful . . . you are on the edge of the quay. . . . Don't turn round, you would be giddy. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Where am I?

SELYSETTE.

By the side of the soft water reservoirs of the castle . . . Didn't you know? . . . You came here by yourself. One has to be very careful; this spot is dangerous. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I didn't know . . . it was so dark. . . . I saw the boxwood hedge, and a bench. . . . I was weary, and sad. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Are you cold? Draw the cloak around you. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Whose cloak is this? Yours, Selysette? You put it over me while I was sleeping? You must be cold. . . . Come hither, let me wrap it round you too. . . . You are trembling more than I. . . . [*Turning round.*] Oh! I see. . . . Now that the moon has risen I can see the glimmer of the water between the walls. . . . If I had moved . . . and it is you. . . . [*She throws a long look at SELYSETTE and puts her arms around her.*] Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Let us not stay here . . . there is fever about this place. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Let us never interfere with moments such as these, Selysette. . . . They do not come a second time. . . . I have seen your soul, Selysette, for just now you loved me, though it was against your will. . . .

SELYSETTE.

We shall catch cold, Aglavainé. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I beseech you, Selysette, do not try to elude me at the very moment when all that is deepest in you is

striving towards me. . . . Do you think I cannot hear the efforts that are being made? . . . Do you think we shall ever be nearer to each other? . . . Shall we allow little childish words, little words that are as thorns, to steal between these poor hearts of ours? . . . Let us speak to each other like human beings, like the poor human beings we are, who speak as best they can, with their hands, with their eyes, with their soul, at times when they fain would utter things too real for words to touch them. . . . Do you think I cannot hear the rushing of your soul? . . . Come close to me, Selysette, come close to me in the night and let my arms enfold you; and it matters not though you find no words to answer. . . . Something is speaking within you, and I hear it as you hear it. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Bursting into tears.*] Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Aglavaine's tears are falling too, Selysette. . . . She is weeping for that she also is ignorant of the thing that should be done, the thing that should be said. . . . We are alone here, my poor Selysette; we two are all alone here in the darkness, clinging closely to each other . . . and the happiness or unhappiness that

must befall is being decided within us, at this very moment, perhaps. . . . But what is to be none can tell. And naught but my tears have I wherewith to question the future. I held myself the wiser of the two, but now that the moment has come that calls for wisdom I feel that my need of you is greater than your need of me. And therefore do my tears flow, Selysette, and therefore do I press my lips upon yours, so that we two may be as near as is possible to that which is being decided in the depths of us. I hurt you sorely this morning. . . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no; you did not hurt me. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I hurt you sorely this morning, and my one desire is never to hurt you again. But how can we help giving pain to those we love the most? Truly does it seem that no sooner do we love another than we draw down upon that other, as well as upon ourselves, sorrows that till then had kept aloof. . . . And even thus have your first tears been called forth by the kiss that was born for you alone, the kiss that I gave at the moment when I felt that my love for you was greater than it ever had been before. . . .

SELYSETTE.

It is true that I have been crying, Aglavaine ; but it was foolish of me. . . . I shall not cry any more.

AGLAVINE.

Never is the path of wisdom clear to us, my poor Selysette. Those who weep may be wise or foolish ; it matters not ; our endeavour must be to wipe away their tears and see they cry no more. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Sobbing.*] Aglavaine !

AGLAVINE.

What is it, Selysette ? You are trembling.

SELYSETTE.

It was the first time I had seen you asleep. . . .

AGLAVINE.

You will often see me asleep, Selysette.

SELYSETTE.

And no one had ever told me anything. . . . No one, no one !

AGLAVINE.

Yes, yes, my poor Selysette, they will doubtless have told you the things they tell to all; for there are none but can speak when they will; and the words that are needful can be heard by all; but you had not yet learned to listen. . . .

SELYSETTE.

It was not the same thing. . . . Never, never. . . .

AGLAVINE.

Because you did not listen, Selysette; and look you, it is not only the ear that listens; and the things that I am saying to you now have not been truly heard save by your heart alone, and your heart has flung the words aside, and gathered only that I love you. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I love you, too. . . .

AGLAVINE.

And therefore have you listened to me, and understood so well all that I cannot say. It is not only our hands that are joined at this moment, my poor Selysette. . . . But Meleander loves you too. Why would you not listen to him? . . .

SELYSETTE.

He is not like you, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

He is better than I; and more than once must he have spoken to you far better than it is possible for me to speak. . . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no! it is not the same thing. . . . Listen, I cannot quite explain what I mean. When he is there I hide within myself. . . . I keep back my tears. . . . I do not want him to think I understand. . . . I love him too much. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Say on, Selysette . . . and I will kiss you, softly, as you speak. . . .

SELYSETTE.

It is so difficult. . . . You will never understand, and I know not how to tell you. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Though I fail to understand your words, I shall know what your tears are saying. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Well, there it is, Aglavaine. . . . I do not want him to love me for anything else. . . . I want him to love

me because it is I. . . . Oh, it is impossible to say quite what I mean! . . . I do not want him to love me because I agree with him, or because I can answer him. . . . It is as though I were jealous of myself. Can you understand a little, Aglavaine?

AGLAVINE.

When we look into a crystal vase we can soon tell whether there be pure water within, Selysette. . . . You were afraid lest he should see how beautiful you are. . . . This fear comes often unto those who love, and who know not why they fear. . . . We are too anxious, perhaps, that the others should divine. . . . And it is a fear that should be overcome. . . . And look you, Selysette, by dint of hiding from others the self that is within us, we may end by being unable to find it ourselves. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I know I am unwise, Aglavaine. . . . I would have him love me, even though I knew nothing, though I did nothing, though I saw nothing, though I were nothing. . . . I feel that I would have him love me though I no longer existed. . . . And so I hid, I hid. . . . I wanted to keep everything hidden. . . . It is not his fault, Aglavaine. . . . And so I was glad when he shrugged his shoulders or shook his head as

he kissed me . . . much happier than when he admired me. . . . But I suppose I am wrong in wishing to be loved like this? . . .

AGLAVINE.

Who can tell how we should love, Selysette? . . . Some love one way, some another; love does this or that, and it is always well, for that it is love. . . . In the very heart of us have we built love's cage, and we eye it as we would a vulture or strange eagle. . . The cage is ours, but the bird belongs to none. We watch it timidly, we ward off cold and hunger, yet know we not what it will do. We know not, will it take flight and bruise itself against the bars, or will it break forth into song. . . . There is nothing in the world that is further away from us than our love, my poor Selysette. Needs must we wait, and try to understand. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Do you love him, Aglavaine?

AGLAVINE.

Whom, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Meleander. . . .

AGLAVINE.

How can I help loving him?

SELYSETTE.

But do you love him as I love him ?

AGLAVINE.

I try to love him as I love you, Selysette.

SELYSETTE.

But if your love for him became too great ? . . .

AGLAVINE.

I do not think one's love can ever be too great.

SELYSETTE.

But if he loves you more than he loves me ?

AGLAVINE.

He will love in you what he loved in me, for it is all one. . . . There is not a creature in the world so like to me as Meleander. How could he not love you, seeing that I love you ? And how could I love you if he did not ? He would no longer be like himself, or like me. . . .

SELYSETTE.

There is nothing in me that he can love, and so much is known to you that I shall never know. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Kiss me, Selysette, and believe me when I tell you that all my knowledge may well be worth no more than what you deem your ignorance. . . . I shall show him that you are more beautiful than he thought, that your feelings lie far deeper too. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Can you bring about that he will still love me when you are there ?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Were he no longer to love you because of my being here, I would go away at once, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I will not let you go away. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Needs would that have to be, for I should no longer love. . . .

SELYSETTE.

It would make me very unhappy, Aglavainé. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

It may be so, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh, I am beginning to love you, to love you, Aglavainé! . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I have loved you for a long time. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I have not; and when first I saw you I did not love you, although I loved you all the same. . . . There was a moment when I wanted . . . oh! wicked things, very wicked. . . . But I did not know that you were like this. I should have been wicked had I been you. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

No, no, my poor Selysette . . . in your real self you would never have been wicked, but, being unhappy, you would not have known how to be good. . . . You would have thought it your duty to be wicked because you had not the courage to be good. We wish every possible ill to befall such as offend us; and then, with the least misfortune that comes to them, we would gladly give them all the happiness we possess could we but dry their tears. But why not love them before the misfortune befell? It can never be wrong to be beforehand with our love, for

with no one in this world does happiness abide unto the end. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I should like to kiss you again, Aglavaine. . . . It is strange; at first I could not kiss you. . . . Oh! I was afraid of your lips . . . I know not why . . . and now. . . . Does he often kiss you?

AGLAVINE.

He?

SELYSETTE.

Yes.

AGLAVINE.

Yes, Selysette, and I kiss him too.

SELYSETTE.

Why?

AGLAVINE.

Because there are things that cannot be told otherwise than by a kiss. . . . Because it is perhaps only when summoned by a kiss that all that is deepest and purest issues forth from our soul. . . .

SELYSETTE.

You can kiss him when I am there, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVINE.

If you wish it I will never kiss him again.

SELYSETTE.

[*Suddenly bursting into tears.*] And you can kiss him when I am not there. . . .

[*She leans on AGLAVAINÉ'S shoulder and sobs softly.*]

AGLAVAINÉ.

Do not weep, Selysette, for you are becoming very beautiful. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I know not why I am crying. I am not unhappy. . . . I am glad I awakened you, Aglavainé. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I too am glad to have awakened you, Selysette. . . . Come, let us go. . . . It is well not to linger too long in a spot where one's soul has been happier than a human soul may be. . . .

[*They go out together with their arms about each other.*]

SCENE III.—*A room in the Castle.*

MELIGRANE *and* SELYSETTE *are at the far end in the shadow.*

MELIGRANE.

It is too much for you, my poor Selysette, say what you will. . . . You shake your head, but at this very moment you are wiping away your tears. . . .

SELYSETTE.

But, grandam, have I not told you that it is only because I am happy that my tears flow? . . .

MELIGRANE.

When people are happy they do not cry like that. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh yes, they must; otherwise, why should I be crying? . . .

MELIGRANE.

Listen to me, Selysette. . . . Just now I heard all you had to tell me about Aglavaine. I cannot speak like she does. I am an old woman who

know but little, yet I have suffered, too, and you are all I have in the world. . . There are truths in these things, let me tell you, that may, perhaps, not be as beautiful as those whereof Aglavaine speaks ; but it is not always the most beautiful truths that are right, and the oldest and simplest that are wrong. . . One thing is very clear to me, my poor Selysette ; and that is that, for all your smiles, your cheek is ever growing paler and paler, and no sooner do you believe you are alone than your tears begin to flow. . . It is wrong to struggle against oneself like this. . . We tell ourselves that our tears are unreasonable, that they are not beautiful ; but only too often, when the end of our life draws near, do we find that it was the tears, and the tears alone, that knew. . . There are, I know, many things more beautiful than tears, and it were often better not to cry. . . But when our tears flow, notwithstanding all our efforts, then must we needs believe in the truth of them, and tell ourselves that there is something in them truer still than all the things of beauty we see above them. . . For, look you, Selysette, it is often destiny that speaks through our tears, and it is perhaps from out the very depths of the future that they flow into our eyes.

[AGLAVINE enters, unperceived, at the back of the room.

MELIGRANE.

You have been crying for a long, long time, my poor Selysette, and you know full well that cry you will have to, still. . . And tell me how you think all this can end. . . I have turned it over patiently, sitting here in this corner of mine, and I am doing what I can to speak calmly, though I grieve to see the suffering that has come to you, and that you have done nothing to deserve. There is only one human solution to sorrows such as these ; either must one of you die or the other go away. . . And who should go away, if not the one whom destiny sent too late ? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Why she, rather than the one who came too soon ?

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Coming forward.*] One cannot come too soon, my poor Selysette . . . one comes when the hour has sounded, and I think our grandmother is right. . .

SELYSETTE.

If she be right there is much unhappiness before us. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

And if she be wrong, still will there be tears. . . Ah ! Selysette, most often there is nothing left to us

but to choose our tears, and if I hearkened only to this poor wisdom of mine, I would tell you that it behoves us to choose the most beautiful, and here it is the tears that have been falling from your eyes that are the most beautiful. . . . But for some days past I too have been uneasy, and more than once have I told myself that there must be a deeper truth underlying the truths within our grasp, a deeper truth that is waiting in the innermost heart of us for its moment to come, and by no word of ours can its smile be lessened or its tears dispelled . . . and to-day I believe I have discovered this truth, and it will guide our footsteps, though we strive our hardest against it. Adieu, my Selysette ; kiss me. It is late ; Meleander is waiting for you. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Will you not come with me and embrace him with me, Aglavaine ?

AGLAVAINÉ.

I shall never kiss him again, Selysette. When we are together I shall press my lips on yours, and thus shall I tell him all I have to tell, even as though it had been his lips that were joined to mine. . . .

SELYSETTE.

What has happened, Aglavaine? Your eyes are shining. You are keeping something from me. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

My eyes are shining because I have no longer anything to keep back, Selysette. . . But a few moments ago I realised how far deeper lay his love for you than he imagined. . .

SELYSETTE.

Did he say so? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Nay, had he said so then had I not been so sure. . .

SELYSETTE.

And you, Aglavaine, does he not love you any more?

AGLAVAINÉ.

He loves me less than he loves you, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh! my poor Aglavaine! . . . But it is impossible. . . Why should he love you less? Tell me what to do. And if you are not happy you must not be alone to-night. . . Shall I stay with you? . . . I will tell him. . .

AGLAVINE.

No, no . . . go to him, Selysette . . . never shall I be happier than I am to-night. . .

[They kiss each other silently and go out by different doors.]

ACT THIRD

SCENE I.—*In the Park.*

Enter MELEANDER and SELYSETTE.

SELYSETTE.

Forgive me, Meleander—you would rather be alone, I know. I am always a cause of sorrow to you; but I will only stay a moment. . . I have just come from Aglavaine's room—she is already asleep; I kissed her on the lips and she awoke not, though the stars were shining on her bed. . . I shall not keep you long; and then we will go and wake her, for she is sobbing in her sleep . . . I was afraid to wake her by myself—but there is something I want to ask you . . . so far, I do not know whether I am right or wrong—or whether it be good or bad . . . I cannot ask Aglavaine, and you will forgive me if I am mistaken.

MELEANDER.

What is it, Selysette?—Come hither, to this bench, and sit upon my knee. I will play with your hair while you talk to me; and not seeing me, you will be able to speak out more bravely . . . I believe there is something that presses heavily on your heart. . .

SELYSETTE.

Not on my heart, Meleander . . . but on me . . . I know not where . . . on my soul, perhaps . . . it is something that weighs me down and makes me understand—what? . . . I know nothing of it yet, but I am happier than when my soul was free. . .

MELEANDER.

What a change has taken place in you, Selysette! I wanted to speak to you, too—your face is not as it used to be, and not even beneath my kisses do the tender flowers of your cheeks spring to life; formerly you were wont to smile when I kissed you like this. . .

SELYSETTE.

In those days my smile may have been more frequent, Meleander, but I am far happier now. . .

MELEANDER.

I know not, Selysette . . . there are times when the poor heart is almost overwhelmed, and the soul still deems itself happy. . . But enough of this; tell me first of all what it is that distresses you to-night. . .

SELYSETTE.

Aglavaine is going. . .

MELEANDER.

Who?—Aglavaine? Did she say so to you?

SELYSETTE.

Yes. . .

MELEANDER.

When? . . . And why is she going?

SELYSETTE.

She did not say . . . but she will certainly go; for now she thinks it is right, and that it should be done . . . and I am asking myself whether it would not be better that I should go instead. . .

MELEANDER.

Who?—You, Selysette?—But what can have happened? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing has happened, Meleander; and I beseech you, say not a word of this to Aglavaine—you would only call forth her tears, though there be no cause for them. . . . But, you see, Meleander, I have been thinking these things over, too, while you and she have been together and I sat there by the side of our grandmother . . . and when you two came back, you were always so happy, so united, that every one was compelled to be silent, as you drew near. I have often said to myself that I am only a poor little creature who could never follow in your footsteps; but you have both been so good to me that I did not realise this as soon as I should, and you have often wanted me to go with you, because I was sad. And when I was there, each of you seemed to be very lighthearted, but there was not the same happiness in your two souls, and I was between you like a stranger shivering with cold. And yet it was not your fault, nor was it my fault either. I know full well that I cannot understand; but I know also that this thing must be understood. . . .

MELEANDER.

My dear, dear and good Selysette, Aglavaine is

right—I never thought you were so beautiful . . . but what is it that you think you do not understand? —Do you imagine that we understand something that you do not? Alas! my poor Selysette, let us but go beneath the surface of things, and how small does the difference become! And none can tell the reasons of their love. But from the moment that you have been able to say what you have just said, it is no longer necessary for you to understand; it is I, and I alone, who did not know. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no, my poor Meleander, it is your heart that says this. . . I know all that I should be, but I never can be what you are. . .

MELEANDER.

I no longer recognise you, Selysette, and I had seen nothing . . . when you speak to me like this, I ask myself from what heaven you have flown. . .

SELYSETTE.

From Aglavaine, Meleander. . .

MELEANDER.

Aglavaine inspires us all, dear child; from the

moment we know her, beauty becomes the fountain of our life . . . but do you believe, Selysette, that there can possibly be much difference between your soul and that of Aglavaine?

SELYSETTE.

Yes, Meleander, there is a great difference, it seems to me. . .

MELEANDER.

I do not believe it, Selysette . . . and now that all that lay beneath that childlike smile of yours is being revealed to me, I believe it less and less. . . It is always the soul that knows how to display itself that attracts us, but the one that hides is no less beautiful; nay it may well be more beautiful, by dint of its very unconsciousness. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no; though I tried my hardest, there would always be a difference, Meleander; and whenever something I do pleases you, it is only because I have been trying to imitate Aglavaine. . .

MELEANDER.

Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh Meleander, I did not say that to reproach you . . . did you think it was meant as a reproach? I am no longer as I used to be, and I shall never reproach any one again. Even I myself cannot tell why I have changed like this, and if any one had told me, a little time ago, that the sadness that would befall me would bring happiness with it, and that I should one day press my lips on the lips of the woman you were to love—if any one had told me this, I should never have believed it; and yet it has all come to pass and I cannot help it. . .

MELEANDER.

I wonder what it is that Heaven will exact in return for having allowed two such women to be near me. . .

SELYSETTE.

I am only a very insignificant creature, Meleander, but I too would like to be more beautiful than I am, and I too would have you love me with weeping eyes, even as your eyes weep when you admire her.

MELEANDER.

To whom do you refer? . . .

SELYSETTE.

To her of whom I am sure you think, whenever you are silent. . .

MELEANDER.

When I am near you, my thoughts are of her; and when I am by her side, it is of you that I think. . .

SELYSETTE.

I know full well that it is not the same thing, Meleander, nor are the tears the same. . . Those sent by pity lie much nearer to hand, while the others can never be forgotten. . . And though you tell me that you love me, thinking thus to drive away my sadness, you can never say to me the things you say to Aglavaine. . .

MELEANDER.

Perhaps I could not say the same things, Selysette. The things that we really wish to say can never be put into words, and it may be that when we wish to speak very earnestly to one we love, we are but replying to questions that the ears cannot hear. And never do two different souls ask the same questions. And therefore, though we know it not, are our words never the same. . . But the

questions that your candid soul puts to me, my poor Selysette, are as beautiful as the questions of Aglavainé's soul. . . They come from another region, that is all. So let that not sadden you, Selysette. We must never be jealous of the soul. . . Do you not believe that at this moment I am speaking to you, in the heart of me, as I would speak to Aglavainé? Do you imagine that anything could be said to a living creature that I am not saying to you? . . . Oh my beautiful Selysette! were an angel from Heaven to float into my arms, into the place that is yours, I could not lay bare my soul more simply or more profoundly than I do to you. . . And all the rest, that should be said, cannot be whispered here below. Let us wait, Selysette; Aglavainé will go or will not go; that is known to her alone and she will do what is right. . . But whether she go or stay, she will have shown me where your beauty lies, she will have taught me to love you at last as I never yet have loved. And whatever happens, Selysette, if tears must needs be shed, it is not you who must shed them. And besides, do you imagine that we could be happy if you left us, dear child? . . . Do you think that a happiness woven out of the sufferings of a little creature like yourself, so pure and so gentle, could be

a lasting happiness? Do you think it would be worthy of us? . . . Do you think that if we were to accept such a happiness Aglavaine could love me or that I could take her to my heart? Our love lies far above ourselves, Selysette; there where we love each other we are pure and beautiful, and there too do we meet you, and for some time now, thanks to you, we have no longer had to love you without seeing you. . . Come, give me your lips. . . I kiss you on your soul to-night, Selysette. . . Come, midnight is striking. . . Let us go and see whether Aglavaine's dream be still weeping through her sleep. . .

[They go out with their arms about each other.]

SCENE II.—*A Room in the Castle.*

Enter AGLAVINE and MELEANDER.

AGLAVINE.

Do you hear that door being closed?

MELEANDER.

Yes.

AGLAVINE.

It is Selysette. . . She heard us coming and wishes to leave us alone together. . .

MELEANDER.

She said to me that she would be going to her tower this morning; they have told her of a great strange bird. . .

AGLAVINE.

I am certain she must have been here; the whole room seems to be awaiting her return. . . Look at the little work things she has left by the window . . . the skeins of silk, the jewels, the gold and silver threads. . .

MELEANDER.

And here is her ring with our names inscribed in it. . . And there are violets—and here is her handkerchief. . . [*He takes the handkerchief and trembles as he touches it.*] Ah! . . .

AGLAVINE.

What is it? . . .

MELEANDER.

[*Hands her the handkerchief.*] Here. . .

AGLAVINE.

Ah! . . .

MELEANDER.

It is still warm with her tears. . .

AGLAVINE.

You see, Meleander . . . as she will not speak, here are these smallest things of all that speak for her and tell me it is time. . . [*She takes the handkerchief.*] Give it to me, Meleander. . . Poor little witness of all that is hidden from us, not to understand thee one must be dead indeed. . .

MELEANDER.

Aglavaine. . .

[*He tries to kiss her.*]

AGLAVINE.

Do not kiss me to-day. . . Love her well, Meleander. . . I rejoice and I grieve at the suffering that her added beauty brings to her. . .

MELEANDER.

I know not what to believe, Aglavaine. . . There are times when I seem to love her almost as much as I love you, and times when I love her more than you, for that she is further from me, or that I understand her less. . . And then, when I see you again, all of

her disappears, I no longer am conscious of her . . . and yet, were I to lose her for ever, not a kiss would I give you again but would be tinged with deepest sadness. . .

AGLAVINE.

I know that you love her, Meleander, and therefore must I go. . .

MELEANDER.

But it is only in you that I can love her, Aglavaine, and when you are far away, all my love will have flown. . .

AGLAVINE.

I know that you love her, Meleander, and so well do I know it that I have more than once envied the poor little girl the love you gave her. . . Ah! do not think that I am perfect! . . . If Selysette is no longer the child she seemed to be, I too have changed since I came to live among you. When I came I was wiser than one had need to be. I told myself that beauty could not be blamed for the tears it caused to flow, and I believed the goodness vain that had not wisdom for its guide. But now I realise that true goodness is human and foolish, and stands in

no need of wisdom. . . I thought myself the most beautiful of women; I know now that the feeblest of creatures are as beautiful as I, and they know not of their beauty. . . When I look at Selysette, I ask myself whether the timid efforts of her tender soul be not greater, and thousands and thousands of times purer and more beautiful, than anything that I can do. There is something in my heart that whispers to me that she is unspeakably beautiful. She has only to stretch out her hands, and they come back laden with her heart's treasure, and she offers the priceless gems as tremblingly as might a little maid who was blind, and knew not that her two hands were full of diamonds and pearls. . .

MELEANDER.

It is strange, Aglavaine. . . When you speak to me of her I admire you and you only, and I love you more and more. . . You praise her, but the praise falls back on you, and nothing in this world can make it otherwise. My love for her can never approach my love for you, even though a God so willed it. . .

AGLAVINE.

That is the injustice of love; were you to praise your brother to me, it is yourself that would become

more beautiful in my eyes. . . Oh Meleander, my heart is full of tears and my lips yearn for yours! . . . I fear it is impossible that those who love should love no longer. . .

MELEANDER.

Yes, it seems impossible to me, Aglavaine. . . And I felt it just now, as I was speaking to Selysette, for as I spoke to her I realised that nothing that I said or she said, or that I thought or she thought, could have any influence on love. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

When I came here, Meleander, I believed that all things were possible, and that no one would be called upon to suffer. . . But now I see that life refuses to conform to our plans, be they never so beautiful. . . . And I feel too that were I to linger by your side and cause others to suffer, I should no longer be what you are, nor would you be what I am, and our love would no longer be the same as our love of to-day. . .

MELEANDER.

It may be so, Aglavaine. . . And, for all that, should we not be in the right? . . .

AGLAVINE.

Ah, Meleander, it matters so little whether one be right or not! Better, I think, be wrong all one's life than bring tears to the eyes of those who are not in the right! . . . I too know all that might be said; but why say it, seeing that we know full well that it can nowise alter the deeper truth that will have none of our most beautiful words. . . It is this we must listen to, this truth that disdains fair speeches! Notwithstanding all that we say and do, it is the simplicity of things that directs our life; and to struggle against that which is simple is only to court failure. . . Why were we made to meet, you and I, when it was too late? Who knows? Who would dare to say that destiny and Providence are not one? . . . It is the voice of our souls that I am trying to hear to-day; and well do I know that what they have tranquilly decided in the depths of us can be changed by no words of ours. . . We are so wise at this moment, my poor Meleander, that those who might chance to hear us would go away saying, "Either must their love be girt with ice, or they know not what true love is," for the lovers of an hour dream not of loving there where our love lies. . .

MELEANDER.

[*Clasping her in his arms.*] I love you, Aglavainé ; and it is the best love of all that is coming upon us. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Putting her arms around his neck.*] I love you, Meleander, and the love that is coming upon us is the love that never dies. . .

[*A silence.*

MELEANDER.

And now tell me, Aglavainé, have you given a thought to what our life will be in the time to come, when we shall be far away from each other, when all that will remain of this great love of ours will be the faint memory that will fade away like all memories? What shall I be doing next year? What will you be doing next year, out yonder? . . . The weary days and months will frown at us as we stretch out yearning arms to each other across the emptiness. . . . Alas, my Aglavainé, I have no desire for tears; and, at the mere thought of what lies in store for us, I feel that I want to press you to me till our hearts burst. . . For all that we may say that our love will remain unchanged through the years that will divide us, and the forests and seas that will stretch between,

this poor life of ours is too full of moments when the tenderest recollection yields before the absence that lasts too long. . .

AGLAVINE.

I know it, Meleander. I know full well that the knowledge of their love can but poorly console the lovers to whom sight of each other is denied. . . Here, we might be happy; there, unhappiness does most assuredly await us. . . And none the less do we both feel that the thing that I am doing is the thing that should be done. . . It will be long before your tears cease to flow; with me, sorrow will always abide, for know as we may that the thing we do is beautiful, our eyes will none the less be full of tears. . . And yet, were you able to pronounce a word that would keep me here, though all else remained unchanged—you would not say that word. . . Needs must those who love that for which others care not, have sorrows that others cannot conceive. There is no reward, my poor Meleander, but we look for no reward. . .

[*They go out.*]

SCENE III.—*At the foot of a tower.*

Enter AGLAVINE and MELEANDER.

AGLAVINE.

'Twas not a moment ago that I saw her. She was at the top of the tower, surrounded by screaming sea-gulls. For the last two or three days she has spent most of her time up there. And I know not what strange shadow it throws across my soul at times. She seems to be less unhappy, but at the same time more troubled in her mind, and it is as though some plan were being prepared in that profound little heart of hers. . .

MELEANDER.

She seems to be smiling at her former life—at the Selysette of old. . . Have you not noticed that there is always a song on her lips? And she is becoming more and more beautiful. . . A mysterious light seems to shine upon her as she walks before us. . . It would be better not to speak of your departure till she is calmer; better to wait till all that is now transforming her has taken deeper root in her soul. . .

AGLAVINE,

No; I shall tell her to-day. . .

MELEANDER,

But how will you tell her, this child who has drawn so close to us, and who, for all her tears, lives but in you? Do you not shrink from inflicting so much sorrow upon her?—for to see you go must infallibly grieve her, even as it would grieve you were a nobler woman than yourself to sacrifice her destiny for a destiny of poorer worth. . .

AGLAVINE.

We have no right to weigh the destiny of others, Meleander. . . And besides, were I to remain here she would be more beautiful than I, and as my beauty waned so would your love wane; wherefore I prefer to be far away, with my beauty undimmed, rather than become less beautiful in your arms. . . And as to what should be said to her, I have thought that over too, and at first I thought it would be well to conceal the truth, so that she should suffer less. . . Do not smile, Meleander. . . There is so little of the ordinary woman in me that you may well be surprised to find that I am like other women in this—that in the

depths of my heart I, too, possess their feeble, tortuous wisdom—and that, when love commands it, falsehood comes to me as readily as to my sisters. . . So I had made up my mind to tell her that I no longer loved you, that I had deceived myself, that your love for me was dead too, and countless other little things that would have lessened me in her eyes, and thus lessened her grief, too. But in truth, when those great pure eyes of hers confronted me, I felt that it was not possible, for that it was not beautiful. . . And is it not better that one's tears should be called forth by some noble deed than that we should owe our happiness to something that tarnishes the soul? . . . Listen. . . I hear her; she is coming down the tower-stairs, singing. . . Leave us, Meleander; I must speak to her alone, for she says things to me that she cannot yet say to you; and besides, it is only when two people are alone together that truth descends from its very fairest heaven. . .

[MELEANDER goes. A silence; then the voice of SELYSETTE is heard as it gradually comes nearer.]

The voice of SELYSETTE.

When forth her love went
(I heard the door close)

When forth her love went,
She smiled. . .

When back he did fare
(I heard the lamp burn)
When back he did fare
Another was there. . .

And I could see Death
(I heard her soul moan)
And I could see Death
That still watches her breath. . .

SELYSETTE *comes in.*

AGLAVAINÉ.

Oh, Selysette, how bright your eyes are this morning! . . .

SELYSETTE.

It is because a beautiful thought has come to me, Aglavainé. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Tell it to me ; we must never keep back a beautiful thought, for all the world is the happier for it. . .

SELYSETTE.

I cannot tell it to you yet, Aglavainé. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Tell it to me none the less ; I may be able to help you. . .

SELYSETTE.

That it is that distresses me, Aglavainé. I feel that I want to tell some one, because I myself do not know. . . but were I to put this thought of mine into words, it would no longer be beautiful. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

How can that be, Selysette ? It seems to me that a beautiful thought becomes more beautiful still when others admire it. . .

SELYSETTE.

Ah, there it is, Aglavainé ! . . . Little Selysette has her secret too, and a secret it must remain ! . . . But what would you have done had you been Selysette—what would you have done if another Aglavainé, even more beautiful than you are, had appeared one fine day and thrown her arms around Meleander ?

AGLAVAINÉ.

I think I should have tried to be happy—to feel that more light had flown into the house, and I should have tried to love her even as you love me, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

You would not have been jealous?

AGLAVAINÉ.

I cannot tell, Selysette . . . in the depths of my heart, perhaps . . . for one moment . . . but I should have recognised that it was unworthy, and I should have tried to be happy. . .

SELYSETTE.

I am on the eve of happiness, Aglavainé. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Not for one single instant shall you ever be unhappy again. . .

SELYSETTE.

I should be perfectly happy if I were only sure that this idea of mine was good. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Must it not be good, seeing that it makes you happy? . . .

SELYSETTE.

It is so difficult to tell, Aglavainé, and I am quite alone. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Then why not tell me? Surely I could help you. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, yes, you would help me . . . but I want you to help me without knowing. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

So there is something you mean to hide from me, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, but only till it has become very beautiful. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

When will it be very beautiful?

SELYSETTE.

When I know . . . when I know. . . Little Selysette can be beautiful too . . . you will see, you will see. . . Oh you will love me much more, both of you. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Is it possible to love you more than we do, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

I would so dearly like to know what you would do, if you were I!

AGLAVAINÉ.

I should be only too glad to tell you, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

If I were to tell you it would no longer be the same, and truth would be impossible to you. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Do I not speak the truth? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, I know; but here you could not. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

You are strange to-day, Selysette; be careful, for it may be that you are wrong. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no; let me kiss you, Aglavainé . . . every kiss will whisper to me that I am not wrong. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

There is a strange brightness in your eyes, my little Selysette . . . as though your soul were overflowing within you. . .

SELYSETTE.

And your eyes are brighter to-day, too, though you try to hide them. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I also have something to say to you, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh what is it, Aglavainé? . . . you look as though you were afraid, as well as I . . . Can it be the same thing? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

What thing, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing . . . I was speaking idly . . . tell me what it is, quickly. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I am afraid it may distress you, Selysette, though it ought to bring happiness to you. . .

SELYSETTE.

Never again will my tears fall, Aglavainé. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Seizing her arm.*] What does this mean, Selysette? You said that so strangely. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no . . . I shall not cry any more, that is all ;
is that not as it should be ?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Let me look into your eyes. . .

SELYSETTE.

Look, look . . . tell me what you see. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

For all that we say that the soul shows itself in
our eyes, it seems to vanish as we gaze into them. . .
And as I stand, with the fears I dare not speak of
upon me, before the limpid waters of your eyes, it is
they that seem to question me, and to murmur
timidly : " What dost thou read ? " in lieu of answer-
ing the question I cannot frame. . .

[*A silence.*]

SELYSETTE.

Aglavainé ? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Selysette ? . . .

SELYSETTE.

What was it you were going to tell me ? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Come to my arms, my little Selysette! Alas! but a little more and I had taken from you all you had in the world. . .

SELYSETTE.

You are sad, Aglavainé? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

No, I am not sad, for you shall be happy. . .

SELYSETTE.

Let me wipe away those heavy tears. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Let them not trouble you, Selysette; and if you weep, too, your eyes must be dried before mine. . . Let us seat ourselves here, upon the threshold of your tower, so that your lips may be closer to mine, even as they were that evening when we spoke to each other for the first time . . . do you remember that evening by the reservoir? More than a month ago, my poor Selysette; many things have died since then, many sprung to life, and a little more light has come unto the soul. Give me your lips, Selysette; let us kiss each other as fervently as two

human beings can. . . Not many more moments such as this will be vouchsafed to us, for to-morrow I wend my way from amongst you, and everything that we do for the last time of all seems so grave and solemn to these poor hearts of ours. . .

SELYSETTE.

You mean to go to-morrow?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Yes, to-morrow, Selysette: it was that I wanted to tell you. At first I thought it would be best to keep back the truth, so that the sorrow should not come upon you all at once . . . but you are so beautiful in my eyes, and my love for you is so lofty that my heart fails me—why should I shield you from a sorrow that can but draw us the closer? . . . And besides, when people have been trying—as we three have been trying this past month—to shape their lives in some accord with the truth and beauty of the soul, the atmosphere changes and the thing that is not true can no longer be said. . . When I thought of you, I felt at once that it could not be. . . And therefore have I come to tell you that to-morrow I shall go from here in order that you may be happy, and I tell it you in all simplicity,

content that you should know how my departure saddens me, content even that you should share in the sacrifice; for we are all three making this sacrifice, and making it for something that, nameless though it be, is yet far stronger than we. . . But is it not strange, Selysette? I love you, I love Meleander; Meleander loves us both, you love Meleander and myself, and for all that we cannot live happily together, because the hour has not yet come when mankind can be thus united. . . And I go away beseeching you to accept my departure in the spirit in which it is offered. . . And accepting it thus, my poor Selysette, your sacrifice will perhaps be greater than mine, while your action will be no less beautiful; and indeed far happier the one who makes the sacrifice than the one for whom it is made. . . I love you, Selysette, and I want to clasp you in my arms, as near to my heart as may be. . . Does it not seem to you, as we stand thus with our arms about each other, with the simple truth of the soul upon us, does it not seem to you that something that is stronger than ourselves is urging us on? . .

SELYSETTE.

Do not go to-morrow, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVINE.

Why not to-morrow, since go I must? . . .

SELYSETTE.

I ask you not to go before I tell what I have to tell. . .

AGLAVINE.

Will you tell me soon?

SELYSETTE.

Yes, for now I am sure. . . And what you have just now told me, does Meleander know?

AGLAVINE.

Yes.

SELYSETTE.

I am no longer sad, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVINE.

What would you have done, Selysette, if I had gone away without telling you?

SELYSETTE.

I should have followed you and brought you back, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVINE.

And if you had not found me?

SELYSETTE.

I should have spent my life seeking you. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

My fear is lest you should go before I do, Selysette — I am wondering whether that can be the idea you spoke of. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, for there would be sorrow in that, and my idea now is full of gladness . . . I had thought, I too, of going away without saying a word, but now. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Now you will not go?

SELYSETTE.

No, no, Aglavainé mine; I shall not leave the castle. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

You promise me that, from the depths of your soul?

SELYSETTE.

From the depths of my soul, and by my eternal happiness, Aglavainé. . .

AGLAVINE.

It had been better, perhaps, that I had never come. . .

SELYSETTE.

In that case I had never been happy or unhappy. for I was nothing. . .

AGLAVINE.

Perhaps it is not well to awaken those who slumber, above all when their sleep be innocent and sweet. . .

SELYSETTE.

Needs must it be well, Aglavaine, for they never wish to sleep again. . . When I think of the time when my eyes were closed, I would fain hide myself for shame. . . When I used to kiss Meleander I was only a little blind girl who did not know. . . but was it altogether my fault that I counted for so little? . . . Whereas now . . . I looked at him to-night as he lay asleep . . . and then . . . I can tell you, Aglavaine? . . .

AGLAVINE.

[*Embracing her.*] Selysette, my little Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

And then I kissed him, but he did not awake. . . And I could see the stars in the blue of the windows; and I felt as though all those stars had come to me to build a heaven in my soul. . . Oh my poor Aglavaine, you will never know—for you always knew. . . But to be able to say, "I love you," to be able to say it with one's eyes open, to the man one loves! . . . I understand now. . . I know not why I am yearning all the time to go away or to die. . . I am happy, and fain would I die, so as to be happier still. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

It is dangerous to think of death at moments of too much happiness. . . I will make a confession to you. . . For one second the fear rushed across me that the idea you spoke of before. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

That that might have been the idea. . .

SELYSETTE.

You need not be afraid, Aglavaine, such an idea as that could only come to quite a little girl. . .

AGLAVINE.

Yes, it would be the idea of a blind little heart, to whom death might seem to be the one proof of love. . . . Whereas, on the contrary, those who love must live; and the more we love, the more must we care to live. . . . But apart from that, I knew that your love for us was far above that kind of love. . . . And surely it is only some one who longs to plunge two fellow creatures into despair who could devise anything so terribly cruel as to place an innocent death between them. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Shall I make a confession too, Aglavaine? . . .

AGLAVINE.

Tell me everything, even as I have told you everything, my little Selysette. It is sweet to feel that there is nothing between us, not even a flower wherein could hide a thought not shared by both. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I had thought of it for an instant. . . .

AGLAVINE.

Of death?

SELYSETTE.

Yes, long ago. . . But I at once told myself all you have just told me; and then something else occurred to me. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

And that is?

SELYSETTE.

Oh something quite different, and it is on the side of life. . . But the time for telling is not yet. . . . You shall see. . . I kiss you, Aglavainé. . . I feel I know not what . . . it is as though my soul—was it you who said it? . . as though my soul were overflowing within me. . . And now I know at last what you would do if you were I. . .

[They go out with their arms about each other.]

ACT FOURTH

SCENE I.—*A terrace overlooking the sea.*

AGLAVINE and SELYSETTE enter and meet each other.

AGLAVINE.

The sun is rising over the sea, Selysette; and the waves are full of joy in their tranquillity. The fragrance and limpid silence of the dawn make one feel as though one were alone in the world, and there is something of the dawn in every word one says; is it not so? . . . This day will be beautiful among all days, Selysette; is it to be the day of my departure?

SELYSETTE.

No, no; you shall not go. . .

AGLAVINE.

How beautiful you are, Selysette—you become more and more beautiful with every rising dawn. . .

Will you not tell me what it is that has thus transfigured you, so that I may share in it before I wend my way from here? . . . Is it that your soul is revelling in its innocence, or have you prayed to a God whom I know not—or do you perhaps love as you never yet have loved? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, I think it is that my love is greater, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVINE.

I came to meet you because I saw you just now from the window of my room. I was frightened, Selysette. . . You were leaning over, nearly all your body was leaning over the crumbling old wall at the top of the tower. I imagined for a moment that the stones were giving way. I turned pale, pale—there was a chill at my heart that I had never known before. I felt my life trembling on my lips. It is the first time that I have had the very taste of life in my mouth—or was it the taste of death? . . . I opened the window and screamed so as to warn you; but you did not understand. . . . Destiny is capricious—you do wrong to tempt it thus. What were you doing up there? This is the third time I have seen you on the tower. . . Your hands

seemed to be pulling at the stones. . . What were you doing, Selysette? You seemed to be seeking something in space. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, I was seeking something. . . Have they not told you? . . . But first of all do not be frightened about me, there is no cause. . . My old tower is stronger than they think; it will outlive us all. Why give it a bad name? It has done no one any harm, so far; and the stones are immovable; I know that better than any one. . . But have you not seen it? Here is something taking place so close to you, and you know nothing of it! . . . Five or six days ago a strange bird came to us, and it flies round and round my tower, and never seems to tire. . . Its wings are green—a strange, pale green, inconceivably strange and pale. . . And there is something else that is inconceivable, too; it seems to grow day by day. . . None have been able to tell me from what country it has come. . . I think it must have made its nest in a crevice in the wall; it was there that you saw me bending over. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Is that the key of the tower, that great golden key with which you are playing? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes; you remember I let it fall the day you arrived. .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Will you give it to me? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Give it to you? . . . Why? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I would like to keep it by me till I go. . .

SELYSETTE.

But why, Aglavainé?

AGLAVAINÉ.

I scarcely know. . . Wait till I am far away before you go up there again, Selysette, and leave the bird with the green wings alone. . . I had a bad dream, and the bird appeared in my dream. . .

SELYSETTE.

Here is the key, Aglavainé. . . I don't mind giving it to you. . . It is heavy. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Yes, it is very heavy, Selysette.

SELYSETTE.

Kiss me, Aglavaine. . . Have I made you unhappy? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

You have never yet made any one unhappy. . .
Your eyes are filled with tears. . .

SELYSETTE.

I was looking at the sun, as I kissed you. . .
Kiss me again. . . I am going to Meleander, he
told me he would rise betimes. . . Good-bye,
Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Slowly.*] Good-bye, Selysette. . . .

[SELYSETTE goes. AGLAVAINÉ waits till she
is far away, then, going to the end of the
terrace, she looks for an instant at the
golden key and, with a sudden movement,
flings it far away into the sea. Then she
goes too.]

SCENE II.—*A room in the castle.*

MELIGRANE *is asleep at the back.* Enter SELYSETTE
holding little YSSALINE by the hand.

SELYSETTE.

Let us kiss grandam first of all; for who will kiss her when we are gone? And yet does she need our kisses as much as others do . . . But say nothing to her. . . Aglavaine took away the key of my tower, because she was afraid. But I have found the other key, the one we thought was lost. And so we can go up without any one knowing, and I will capture the green bird. . .

YSSALINE.

Will you give it to me at once?

SELYSETTE.

I will give it to you if you say nothing. But be careful. I am going to awaken grandam. . . Do I look unhappy, Yssaline? . . .

YSSALINE.

Is there anything I can say that would make you happy, little sister?

SELYSETTE.

You must tell me the truth. . . Grandam must not imagine that I am unhappy. You see, often when one is very happy people make mistakes and believe one has been crying. . . You cannot see that I have been crying ?

YSSALINE.

Let me look at you carefully, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

Can you see anything ?

YSSALINE.

You must come nearer to me, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

I will take you in my arms and kiss you. . . You see nothing ? . .

YSSALINE.

One never quite knows when you are crying, little sister ; you do it so softly. . .

SELYSETTE.

But I have not been crying at all. It must be a cinder or something that cannot be seen. . . And remember, if they ask you to-day, when you are

alone, "What did she say, what did she do, was she pale, or sad?" you must not answer all at once if you see that they are frightened, or if those about you are too pale. . . But you must tell them that I seemed to be happy, and indeed every one can see that I do nothing but smile, that I am smiling all the time; and we must always tell the truth. Now, be careful, for I am going to grandam. . . Ah! how forsaken she looks! . . . [*She imprints a long kiss upon MELIGRANE's lips.*] Grandam. . . [*MELIGRANE does not awake.*] It is I, grandam. . . How heavily she sleeps. . . Grandam, I am come to bid you good-bye. . .

MELIGRANE.

[*Awaking.*] Ah! it is you, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, grandam, Yssaline and I have come to kiss you, for we are going for a walk to-day. . .

MELIGRANE.

Whither are you going?

SELYSETTE.

I know not yet, but we mean to go a little further than usual. . . We shall not be back before evening. Have you all you need, grandam? Aglavaine

will come and take care of you in my stead. Shall I arrange the cushions before I go? I am the only one who knows how to lift you up without hurting you. But Aglavaine will learn. She is so good that she will know at once if you will only let her. . . Shall I call her? . . .

MELIGRANE.

No, no; I shall sleep till you return. . .

SELYSETTE.

Good-bye, grandam, good-bye. . .

MELIGRANE.

Good-bye, Selysette; come back before the night. . .

[SELYSETTE goes quickly, holding little YSSALINE by the hand.]

SCENE III.—*A corridor in the castle.*

MELEANDER meets SELYSETTE, who is holding little YSSALINE by the hand.

MELEANDER.

Whither are you going so hurriedly, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Nowhere, Meleander. . . We are seeking shelter from the sun. . .

MELEANDER.

In very truth this is a day when the stones seem to melt in the walls, and the sea to have turned into a fiery lake. The eternal freshness of the forest is nothing but the heated breath of a funeral pile; and the sun looks like a raging lion about to swallow up the sky. . . Kiss me, Selysette, for if there linger yet any fragrance of the dawn it is surely to be found on your lips. . .

SELYSETTE.

No; I have no time; they are waiting for me—you shall kiss me this evening. . .

MELEANDER.

What is the matter, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Ah! it is such a little thing and over so soon! . .

MELEANDER.

What do you say?

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing. . . Kiss me quickly. . .

[She kisses him violently.]

MELEANDER.

Ah! . . . my lip is bleeding. . .

SELYSETTE.

What?

MELEANDER.

A drop of blood. . . Those beautiful little teeth of yours have wounded me, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh, I am a little . . . a little wolf. . . Have I hurt you, Meleander? . . .

MELEANDER.

Not in the least . . . it is nothing. . . See, it has already left off. . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh, I am a little . . . a little wolf. . . What time is it?

MELEANDER.

Close on noon.

SELYSETTE.

Noon? Oh, I must hurry . . . they are waiting, waiting, . . . Good-bye, my Meleander. . .

MELEANDER.

Selysette, Selysette, whither are you going?

SELYSETTE.

[Singing as she hastens away with little

YSSALINE,

When forth her love went

(I heard the door close)

When forth her love went

She smiled. . .

[MELEANDER stands looking after her: then goes out.

SCENE IV.—*At the top of the tower.*

Enter SELYSETTE and little YSSALINE.

SELYSETTE.

Here we are, Yssaline, in the turret of the tower, and now we must know what we have to do. . . Oh the brightness there is this morning over earth and

sea and sky! Why is this day so much more beautiful than other days? . . .

YSSALINE.

Where is the green bird?

SELYSETTE.

He is there, but we cannot see him yet. . . In a minute or two we will lean over the wall, but let us look around us first. One can see the castle and the courtyards, the woods and the gardens. All the flowers have opened on the water-banks. . . How green the grass is this morning! . . . I cannot see Aglavaine. . . Oh look, there is Meleander. . . He is waiting for her. . . Bend down, we must hide; he must not know we are here. He is close to the reservoir, it was there that I awakened Aglavaine. . .

YSSALINE.

Little sister, little sister, look out here. . . I can see the gardener planting flowers round the house. . .

SELYSETTE.

You will see them grow and you will see them open, Yssaline, and you will pluck them for me. . . Come,

come, it is more than I can bear. . . Let us look from here; here there is only the sea, which is far away. . . [*They go to the other side of the tower.*] How beautiful the sea is too! . . . In not a single corner is sorrow to be found to-day. . . The sea is so green, so deep, so beautiful, that one's courage goes. . . And for all this, my little Yssaline, it will go on smiling just the same until nightfall. . . Look at the little waves on the beach. . . I cannot, I tell you, I cannot! . . . The flowers and the sea will not let me. . . I shall never be able to do it in the daytime. . .

YSSALINE.

Oh, here are the gulls, little sister, the gulls are coming! Oh how many there are! . . . how many! There must be two thousand! . . .

SELYSETTE.

They have all flown here together from the far end of the sea. . . They look as though they were bringing us news. . .

YSSALINE.

No, no; it is fish they are bringing, little sister. . . And their young ones are screaming, too, from their holes in the wall. . . Their beaks are bigger than

themselves. . . Look, look do you see that great gull with the eel? . . . Don't you see? . . . There, there. . . They have eaten it already. . . And the others are over there too. . . The big ones are eating nothing. . . There again, did you see? . . . She kept nothing for herself. . . Is she the mother, little sister?

SELYSETTE.

What did I say to grandam, Yssaline?

YSSALINE.

Why are you crying, little sister?

SELYSETTE.

I am not crying, Yssaline—I am thinking, thinking. Did I kiss her before I went away? . . .

YSSALINE.

Yes, you kissed her as you said good-bye.

SELYSETTE.

How often did I kiss her?

YSSALINE.

Once, little sister, we had no time. . .

SELYSETTE.

I fear I was not gentle enough. . .

YSSALINE.

We were in a great hurry, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no; it must not be. . . She will be quite alone, Yssaline, and this will ever linger in her mind. You see, if you have not been gentler than usual when you go away, they believe that you no longer love them. . . Whereas it is the contrary that they should believe; it is just when our love is too great that we are afraid to be gentle. . . Though perhaps we are wrong; for whatever they do, and were they to live a thousand years, it is only the last word we said to them that they can remember. . . I saw that myself when my mother went. . . At the last moment of all she did not smile at me, and it comes back to me again and again that she did not smile. . . And the rest of life scarcely seems to count. . . And besides, what did I say of Aglavaine? . . . I don't remember. I must see grandam again. . . The others, it is for them; they must not know. . . But she is quite alone; and it is not for her sake that I climb into the tower, not for her sake that I shall go down therefrom . . . you must see that it is impossible. . . Come, come, we will go and kiss her very tenderly. . .

[*They go out.*]

SCENE V.—*A room in the castle.*

MELIGRANE *is asleep.* SELYSETTE *and little YSSALINE come in.*

SELYSETTE.

[*Waking Meligrane.*] Grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

You are back at last, Selysette. . . I have long been waiting for you. . .

SELYSETTE.

Forgive me, grandam, I fear I was not as gentle as I should have been when I bade you good-bye. . .

MELIGRANE.

Oh but you were, Selysette, you were very gentle. What is the matter? There is something on your mind. . .

SELYSETTE.

There is nothing on my mind, grandam. It is only that I feel I must tell you how I love you. . .

MELIGRANE.

I know you do, my Selysette. Many times have you

given me proofs of your love; and I have never doubted it. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, grandam, I know . . . but I myself have never known till now. . .

MELIGRANE.

Come nearer to me, my child—you know that I can no longer embrace those I love, now that these poor arms of mine have ceased to do my bidding. . . Put your arms around me again as I cannot put mine around you. . . You seem strange to-day, Selysette. And so it is only now that you know you love me? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh no; I knew it, I knew it, but sometimes one knows a thing so long without knowing. . . And then, one day, we feel we have not been kind enough, that we might have done more, that we have not loved as we should have loved. And we want to begin again before it be too late. I have neither father nor mother, grandam, and had you not been there, I had forgotten what a mother might mean. . . . But you never forsook little Selysette, and it was a great joy to know there was some one to go to when I was unhappy. . .

MELIGRANE.

No, no, Selysette mine, it was you who did not abandon me. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no, grandam. . . I know full well that it is you who stayed on for my sake. . .

MELIGRANE.

You are strangely serious this afternoon, Selysette, and for all that you do not seem to be sad. . .

SELYSETTE.

I have always been very happy, grandam, and now I know where happiness lies . . .

MELIGRANE.

You do not mean that it has gone from you, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Far from that, I believe I have found it, grandam . . . And tell me, have you been happy?

MELIGRANE.

When, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

In the time that is gone, grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

Of what time do you speak, my child ?

SELYSETTE.

The time when life was. . .

MELIGRANE.

There have come to me days of sorrow even as they come to all that live on this earth, but I may truly claim to have been happy, seeing that you have never quitted this house. . .

SELYSETTE.

Not on that should your happiness depend, grandam. . . Would you never be glad again if I were no longer here ? . . .

MELIGRANE.

When I am there no longer happiness may still come to you, my child, for though I be gone, much will still remain to you. . .

SELYSETTE.

If you were to lose me you would still have Aglavaine, grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

I have never lulled her to sleep on my knee, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

And none the less must you love her, grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

You love her, and therefore do I love her, my child. . .

SELYSETTE.

And most of all should you love her, because it was she who brought happiness to me. . . She is so beautiful, she is so beautiful that ever since my heart has known of her, I have lived by her side with my eyes full of tears. . .

MELIGRANE.

How your hands burn to-day, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

It is because my happiness is too great, grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

I love you, Selysette mine. . .

SELYSETTE.

Have I ever been the cause of sorrow to you, grandam?

MELIGRANE.

I cannot remember, my child. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, yes, you must needs remember . . . for we bring sorrow to all those we love. . . But tell me, I beg of you, when it was that I caused you the most sorrow. . .

MELIGRANE.

It was only when you shed tears that you saddened me; and then it was not your fault. . . I remember nothing else. . .

SELYSETTE.

Never again will you see me shed tears, grandam. . . .

MELIGRANE.

Look you, Selysette, happiness is a pendulum that swings to and fro between men, and our tears must be kept back as long as we can. . .

SELYSETTE.

You are right, grandam; and when happiness shall have returned to you—to them and to you, grandam mine, do you gather them about you one evening and tell them the story of a poor little girl. . .

MELIGRANE.

What are you saying, Selysette ?

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing. . . I was thinking of the days when I was a little child. . .

MELIGRANE.

So do I often think of those days, Selysette. I was not ill, then, and I was able to carry you in my arms or run after you. . . . You wandered to and fro and your laughter rang through the house, then suddenly you would fling open the door and shriek, in terror : "She is coming, she is coming, she is here !" And no one knew whom you meant, or what it was that frightened you ; you did not know yourself ; but I would pretend to be frightened too and would go through the long corridors with you till we reached the garden. And it all went for very little and served no purpose, my child ; but we understood each other, you and I, and smiled at each other, night and morning. . . And thus, thanks to you, have I been a mother a second time, long after my beauty had left me ; and some day you will know that women never weary of motherhood, that they would cherish death itself, did it fall asleep on their knee. . . But little

by little all passes away, Selysette, and the very smallest soon cease to be small. . .

SELYSETTE.

I know it, grandam, and sorrow passes away, too, passes away and disappears. . . But beauty remains and others are happy. . .

MELIGRANE.

Who told you that, my child?

SELYSETTE.

All that have I learned from Aglavainé, grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

How your eyes sparkle to-day, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Stifling a sob.*] It is because I love all the world, grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

I believe you are crying, my child? . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh no, I am not crying; and if one or two tears are falling, they are only tears of joy. . .

MELIGRANE.

Put your arms around me, Selysette—closer, closer, and stay with me. . .

YSSALINE.

Little sister, I want to be kissed too. . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Gently moving Yssaline away.*] No, no, Yssaline, she shall have all my kisses to-day. . . The day will soon come when it will be your turn to have all the kisses. . . . farewell, grandam, farewell. . .

MELIGRANE.

Selysette! . . . what is the matter? . . . where are you going? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Farewell, grandam, farewell. . .

MELIGRANE.

Selysette, stay here. . . I won't have it. . . You shall not go. . . [*She struggles in vain to rise and stretch out her arms.*] I cannot, I cannot. . . You see that I cannot, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I, too, cannot, grandam . . . farewell, grandam

mine . . . sleep in peace to-night and let no bad dreams come to you . . . farewell, farewell. . .

[She goes out quickly holding little Yssaline by the hand.]

MELIGRANE.

Selysette! . . . Selysette! . . .

[She is heard sobbing softly to herself as the light grows fainter and fainter.]

SCENE VI.—*A Corridor in the Castle.*

[Enter SELYSETTE holding little YSSALINE by the hand. She sees AGLAVAINÉ coming to meet her, and hides with little YSSALINE behind one of the pillars which support the roof.]

AGLAVAINÉ.

[Drawing near.] Is it you, Selysette? Why are you hiding?

SELYSETTE.

I scarcely know, Aglavainé. . . I thought you would like to be alone. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Whither were you going, Selysette? . . . And here

is little Yssaline looking at me from the corners of her eyes. . . Is there a plot between you ?

SELYSETTE.

I have made a promise that I needs must keep. . .

AGLAVINE.

Whither were you dragging Selysette, Yssaline ?
[YSSALINE *does not answer.*] You won't tell me ? And if I were to kiss you till you told me ?

SELYSETTE.

Oh, she knows how to keep a secret quite as well as though she were grown up. . .

AGLAVINE.

I know not whether it be because of the evening light, but you look very pale, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I want to kiss you, Aglavaine. . .

[*They exchange a long kiss.*]

AGLAVINE.

Oh, your lips are soft and sweet to-night, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yours too, Aglavainé. . . I am very happy. .
There is strength on your lips. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

A light shines from you as from a lamp, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

You have not seen grandam ?

AGLAVAINÉ.

No. Shall I go to her ?

SELYSETTE.

No, no ; there is no need ; she is asleep. . . You
were looking for Meleander ?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Yes. And you, Selysette ?

SELYSETTE.

When you see him, kiss him for me. . . I am
glad to think that it is you who will kiss him when I
am not there. . . I love you so much that I should
be jealous were there no one he could take in his
arms. . .

AGLAVINE.

It is you who are becoming the more beautiful,
Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh, that is so easy when one knows. . . But look
how impatient Yssaline is and how she is pulling my
hand. . . Good-bye, Aglavaine mine; you will see
me soon. . .

*[She goes with little YSSALINE, and sings as she
moves along.]*

When back he did fare

(I heard the lamp burn)

When back he did fare

Another was there . . .

And I could see. . . Ah! Ah! . . .

*[The song ceases suddenly and AGLAVINE goes
out.]*

SCENE VII.—*At the top of the Tower.*

Enter SELYSETTE and little YSSALINE.

SELYSETTE.

And now the hour has come, my little Yssaline. I
shall not go down to them again; I shall not smile

tenderly at them again. . . How cold it is in the tower; the wind comes from the north. See the light that it throws on the waves. . . The flowers are hidden from sight, the voice of mankind is still, and sadness hangs over all. . . How different from this morning. . .

YSSALINE.

And where is the bird, little sister?

SELYSETTE.

Let us wait till the sun has sunk into the very depths of the sea, till the light lies dead on the horizon, for the bird is afraid of the light, and never yet has he looked at the sun. . .

YSSALINE.

And if there should be any stars, little sister?

SELYSETTE.

And if there should be any stars? . . . [*Looking at the sky.*] There are no stars yet, but they are all waiting, eager to peer through the sky; and we must hasten, for it will be still more terrible when they are there. . .

YSSALINE.

I am very cold, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

Let us sit here ; the wall will keep the wind from us, and we will wait till the last gleam of crimson shall have died away in the sea. . . How slowly the sun is sinking. . . When it is gone I will look for the bird. . . Let me wrap my white shawl about you ; I shall want it no more. . .

YSSALINE.

Why are you holding me so close to you, little sister ? . .

SELYSETTE.

Because my happiness is too much for me, Yssaline ; never have I been happier than I am to-day. . . But look well at me. . . Am I not more beautiful than I used to be ? . . . I am smiling, I am sure I am smiling. . . Why do you not smile at me ? . . .

YSSALINE.

You are speaking so quickly, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

Am I speaking quickly ? . . . I have no time to lose. . .

YSSALINE.

And besides, you are tearing up all my flowers. . .

SELYSETTE.

What flowers? Oh, these! . . . I was forgetting that they were yours. . .

YSSALINE.

I will not have you cry, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

But I am not crying, my little Yssaline. . . That is the very last thing of all that any one must believe. . . . I am smiling so much that I seem to be crying. . .

YSSALINE.

Then why do your eyes seem to be crying? . . .

SELYSETTE.

How can I tell what my eyes choose to do? . . . But remember this well: if you tell any one that I seemed to be sad, you will be punished for a long, long time. . .

YSSALINE.

Why?

SELYSETTE.

For reasons that will some day be revealed to you. And you must not ask me so many questions; you are only a little creature who cannot yet under-

stand the things that are clear to others. I did not understand either when I was your age, nay, not until very long after. . . I may do this or that; but it is not the things you see that matter the most. . . Look you, my little Yssaline, I must not speak of it, although I have a pressing desire to tell some one, for it is so sad to be the only one who knows. . .

YSSALINE.

You can hardly see the sun now, little sister. .

SELYSETTE.

Wait, wait yet a little, Yssaline; for as the sun goes down, so does something else come nearer, and the nearer it comes to me the more clearly do I see. . . I can no longer tell whether I have acted wisely in bringing you to the tower; yet was it necessary that some one should come with me, for they will want to know all that took place, and they will be happy if only they do not know. . . You do not understand a word of what I am saying to you now, little sister mine. . . Yes, but a day will come when you will understand it all, when you will see all that you cannot see now that your eyes are beholding it. . . And then sorrow will come to you, nor will you ever be able to forget what you are about to see.

. . . And you had perforce to see without understanding, for otherwise how contrive that the others should not understand? . . . But when you are a woman you will shed many tears because of this, and it may even weigh upon your life. . . And therefore do I ask you to-day to pardon me, though you know not why, for the suffering that will come upon you some time when you know too well. . .

YSSALINE.

The flocks are coming back, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

They will come back to-morrow too, Yssaline.

YSSALINE.

Yes, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

And the birds will sing to-morrow. . .

YSSALINE.

Yes, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

And the flowers will flower to-morrow. . .

YSSALINE.

Yes, yes, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

Why had it to be the younger of the two? . . .

YSSALINE.

There is only a little red line there now, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

You are right; it is time. . . You yourself are urging me to it; and the stars too are growing impatient. . . Farewell, Yssaline mine. I am very, very happy. . .

YSSALINE.

So am I, little sister. Be quick, the stars are coming. . .

SELYSETTE.

Have no fear, Yssaline; they will see me no more. . . . Arise, sit in this corner, and let me fasten my shawl around you, for the wind is very cold. . . Did you really love me? No, no; do not answer; I know, I know. . . I am going to roll these four great stones over here, so that you cannot go near the big opening over which I mean to bend. . . Do not be frightened if you should not see me any more. It will only mean that I have had to go down the other side.

. . . Do not wait for me ; go down the stone staircase by yourself. . . And, above all, do not try to see what I have done, do not go near this wall. . . You would see nothing and they would punish you. . . I shall wait for you below. . . Kiss me, Yssaline, and tell grandam. . .

YSSALINE.

What shall I tell her, little sister ? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing. . . I thought I had forgotten something. . . [*She goes to the crumbling wall that faces the sea and leans over.*] Oh, how deep and cold the sea looks ! . . .

YSSALINE.

Little sister ?

SELYSETTE.

There it is ; I see it. . . Do not move. . .

YSSALINE.

Where is it ? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Wait . . . wait. . . I must bend over a little more.

. . . Yssaline! . . . Yssaline! . . . The stones are trembling! . . . I am falling! . . . Oh!

[A side of the wall gives. The sound of a fall is heard, and a low cry of pain. Then a long silence.]

YSSALINE.

[Rising, in tears.] Little sister! . . . little sister! . . . Where are you? . . . I am frightened, little sister! . . .

[She bursts out sobbing, alone in the turret.]

ACT FIFTH

SCENE I.—*A Corridor in the Castle.*

Enter AGLAVINE *and* MELEANDER.

MELEANDER.

She has fallen asleep; but the doctors are going, and, pray as I might, I have not been able to draw a single word of hope from them. . . She fell on to a hillock of sand, that the sea-wind had swept to the foot of the tower, as though to receive her more tenderly. It is there that the servants found her, whilst you were hoping to meet her on the road to the village. There is no wound to be seen, no injury apparent on her poor little body; but a stream of blood flows from her lips; and when she opened her eyes she smiled at me, but said not a word. . .

AGLAVINE.

But Yssaline? What does Yssaline say? They tell me she was with her. . .

MELEANDER.

I have questioned her. . . She was found at the top of the tower, trembling with cold and fright. . . . She repeats, over and over again, through her tears, that the wall opened while Selysette was leaning over so as to lay hold of a bird that was passing. . . . When I met her this afternoon, here in the corridor—and it was on this very spot, between the pillars — she seemed less sad than usual. . . . “She seemed less sad than usual!” . . . Do we not both stand condemned by these words? . . . And now, when I think of all she has said to us, of all she has done, monstrous suspicions burst upon my soul, and crush my life. . . . Love is as cruel as hate. . . . I no longer believe, I no longer believe. . . . And all my sorrow turns into loathing! . . . Curses on the beauty that brings disaster with it! . . . Curses on the mind that craves for too much beauty! . . . Curses on the destiny that is blind and deaf! . . . And I curse the words that deceive and betray, and I curse the life that will not give ear to life! . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Meleander. . .

MELEANDER.

What do you want of me? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Come with me. . . I must see her, for it is not possible. . . . We must know. . . She cannot have done it deliberately. She cannot, for in that case. . .

MELEANDER.

In that case?

AGLAVAINÉ.

We must know. . . Come. . . No matter how. . . . Her suffering must have been too great before she could have done that! . . . And I would never again be able, never, never. . .

[*She drags him away quickly.*]

SCENE II.—*Selysette's Bedroom.*

SELYSETTE *lies upon her bed.* Enter AGLAVAINÉ and MELEANDER.

SELYSETTE.

[*With a slight movement.*] Is it you, Aglavainé? Is it you, Meleander?—I was only waiting for you to become perfectly happy. . .

MELEANDER.

[*Bursting into tears as he throws himself upon the bed.*] Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

What is the matter? . . . You are both crying. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Selysette! Selysette! . . . What have you done?
. . . Oh wretch that I am! . . .

SELYSETTE.

What is the matter, Aglavainé? . . . Why are you so distressed? . . . Have I done anything to make you unhappy? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

No, no, my poor Selysette, you do not bring unhappiness with you. . . It is I who bring death . . . it is I who have failed to do all that I should have done. . .

SELYSETTE.

I do not understand, Aglavainé. . . What has happened—tell me. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I ought to have known, Selysette, and I thought I

did know, when I spoke to you the other day. . . For many days past something has been unceasingly crying aloud in my heart, and I found nothing, and knew nothing, of what should be done—though it needed but the simplest word that the simplest creature on earth might have spoken to save a life that only craved to live. . .

SELYSETTE.

What did you know? tell me. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

When you spoke of that idea of yours, the other day, Selysette . . . and this morning, and again this afternoon, I should have held you close to me, so close that it should have fallen between us like a pressed-out grape. . . I should have plunged my two hands into your soul, and dragged forth the death that I felt was living there. . . I should have achieved something by dint of love . . . and I knew of nothing I could do, and I looked on and was blind to it all, though I saw everything, everything! . . . The wretchedest girl of this wretched village would have found a kiss that should save life for us! . . . Either have I been unutterably base or unutterably blind! . . . The first time, perhaps, that I

have fled from the truth like a child! . . . And I dare not probe into myself. . . Forgive me, Selysette; never again will gladness dwell with me. . .

SELYSETTE.

Truly, I know not what you mean. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Do not you too fly from the truth. . . I refused to listen to all that was being said at the deepest of me—and you see the result. . .

SELYSETTE.

What was it that was being said?

AGLAVAINÉ.

By day and by night did I hear that you were seeking death. . .

SELYSETTE.

'Twas not I that sought it, Aglavainé mine; I went not to meet it, but it came to me. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Death had pity on us, and it was not you it was seeking. See how it has shrunk from you as you clutched at it. . .

SELYSETTE.

Nay, nay, Aglavaine mine, it is but waiting till you be happier. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Long must it wait then, my poor Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Hearken to me, Aglavaine. I am indeed glad that you delayed not, but came to me at once, for I feel that ere long my mind will wander from me. . . Something there is, here, which presses on my eyelids. . . But whatever I may say, later on—I cannot tell what I may say—you know the strange fancies that flit across the dying. . . I was at a death-bed once, and it is my turn now. . . Well, whatever I may say later on, do you pay no heed. . . But at present I know what I am saying; and do you listen to that only, and recall that only, and that alone. . . Surely there lingers not a doubt within you, Aglavaine? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Of what should I be in doubt, my poor Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Do you imagine that . . . ?

AGLAVINE.

Yes. . .

SELYSETTE.

That it was not by accident I fell ?

AGLAVINE.

I know it was not, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

We are told that falsehood is impossible to those who die, Aglavaine, and I mean to tell you the truth. . .

AGLAVINE.

I knew full well that, from the love you bore us, you would be strong enough for that. . .

SELYSETTE.

It was an accident, and I fell, Aglavaine mine.—
Is it you who are sobbing, Meleander ?

AGLAVINE.

Hearken now to me, Selysette. . . You know that the truth is known to us. . . And if at this moment I question you, it is not from doubt of mine, but it is so that you, you, should doubt no more. . . You are very beautiful, Selysette, and I am on my knees before you. . . The thing that you have done, so simply,

is the most beautiful thing whereof love is capable when love deludes itself. . . But now I ask you to do something more beautiful still, and I ask it in the name of another, and an undeluded, love. . . Locked between your lips, there lies the perfect peace of all our life. . .

SELYSETTE.

Of what peace do you speak, Aglavainé?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Of one that is far-reaching, and very sad. . .

SELYSETTE.

But how can I give it to you, Aglavainé? Where shall I seek it within me? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

You need but tell us that you wished to die, thinking thus to make us happy. . .

SELYSETTE.

Gladly would I say this to you, Aglavainé, but it is impossible, seeing that it is untrue. . . You do not believe that one could tell an untruth on one's death-bed? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I beseech you, think not of death, Selysette. . .

See, I kiss you, and pour all my life into your veins, and flood your soul with the spirit of life—and surely death cannot come near! . . . Oh God! how to prolong her life! . . . See, if death were here I could understand the telling of this falsehood. . . But death is far away, and all life is clamouring for the truth. . . Say not no, Selysette; and do not shake your head; speaking to each other as we are now speaking, can we possibly be mistaken? . . .

SELYSETTE.

And none the less are you wrong, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Must we weep far apart then, with thousands of miles between us? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Why will you not believe it to be true?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Not even a child would believe it—for there is not a word of yours, not an act, but proves the contrary. . .

SELYSETTE.

Which words and acts do you speak of? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Why did you bid farewell to your grandam ?

SELYSETTE.

Never did I leave the house but first I bade her good-bye. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Why. . . But why everything, Selysette ? . . . Oh, the misery of asking questions such as these, when death is close by, and we know that the truth is there, to our hand, nestling beneath her heart ! . . .

SELYSETTE.

Your doubts will sadden me, Aglavainé, and I was feeling happy. . . What can I do so that you shall doubt no more ? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Give us the truth, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

But what is the truth you desire ? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

It was I who, all unwittingly, urged you to this. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no, Aglavaine, urged was I by none. . .

AGLAVINE.

It needs but one word to dispel the clouds from life, and on my knees do I beseech you to say this one poor word. . . Whisper it to me if you will, let your eyes make a sign to me, and even Meleander shall never know. . .

MELEANDER.

Aglavaine is right, Selysette. . . I ask it, too. . .

SELYSETTE.

I was leaning over, and I fell. . .

AGLAVINE.

You asked me so often what I would do in your place. . .

SELYSETTE.

I was leaning over, and I fell. . .

AGLAVINE.

Do you not know why I question you thus? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, yes, Aglavaine mine, I can see that it would

have been more beautiful, but it would not be the truth. . .

AGLAVINE.

[*Sobbing.*] Oh, God! how poverty-stricken we are before all those of simple love! . . .

SELYSETTE.

Aglavaine! . . .

AGLAVINE.

Selysette! . . . What has happened? . . . You are turning pale. . . . Is the pain worse? . . .

SELYSETTE.

No. . . It is the joy that makes me suffer. . . Oh! how you are weeping, Meleander! . . .

MELEANDER.

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

Do not weep like this, my poor Meleander. . . Now do we indeed love each other. . . There is no reason for the shedding of a tear. . . Soon I shall be dead, and there will be so glad a smile on my lips that you will scarce believe I can be dead, so happy shall I seem. . . To smile at such a moment one has to be truly, deeply happy, and I cannot conceive how, little as I am, I can yet hold

so great a paradise in my heart; and at times I am afraid that I shall take all the happiness away with me. . . What? You crying too, Aglavaine? Is it not happiness, then? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Give us the perfect peace, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I will give you the peace you gave me, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

You could give it, but you will not. . .

SELYSETTE.

And yet is there such great peace within me, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Sobbing.*] God Himself were wrong before you, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

[*With a change in her voice.*] But why are you going away, said my grandam to me, why go away, my child? Because of a key I have found, grandam, because of a key I have found. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Coming to herself.*] Yssaline! . . . What was I saying? . . . Tell me what I said . . . it is not true . . . I warned you. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

You said nothing, nothing . . . be not uneasy, my poor Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I warned you. . . I may perhaps be saying things soon, but they will not be true. . . You will forgive me, for my soul is growing so weak. . . Did I speak of grandam? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Yes. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, I wanted to tell you. . . You must raise her without touching her arms. . . . I would have taught you, but time, time would not allow. Oh! Aglavainé, be careful! . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Alarmed.*] What is it, what is it, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing; it is going. . . I thought I was about to say things that were not true. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I will not ask for the truth any more, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Put your hand over my mouth when I say things that are untrue. . . Promise, promise, I beseech you. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I promise, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE to MELEANDER.

I have something to say to her, Meleander. . .
[MELEANDER goes away silently.] He is sad, he is sad. . . . You will tell him some day, by-and-by, when he has forgotten . . . put your hand on my lips, Aglavainé, a sudden pain has come to me. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Tell me, tell me, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I have forgotten what I had to say. . . It was not truth, but falsehood, that was coming. . . Put

your hand over my eyes, too. . . . It is well that they should be closed by you who opened them. . . . It is time, it is time. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Very faintly.*] I was . . . I was leaning over, and I fell. . . . [She dies.]

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*With a sob.*] Meleander. . . .

MELEANDER.

[*Falls, sobbing, on to SELYSETTE'S body.*] Selysette! . . .

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